

# WAR, WINE AND WOMEN

BY  
WILFRED SAINT-MANDÉ



एवम श्री वेनिप्रसाद सिंह  
राजिपंडी, इलाहाबाद  
के सम्मानार्थ से  
पुस्तक प्राप्त हुई



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## CHAPTER I

WHEN the Great War broke out in August, 1914, I was looking forward with pleasure to my eighteenth birthday. My year in the VIth Form at Fairleigh had, on the whole, been happy and profitable. It is not given to all to play for their school at cricket and Rugby, while preparing for and securing a modern languages scholarship at Oxford. Although pretending to be somewhat blasé, I was suffering badly from swelled head and egotism. Few adults could, with hand on heart, declare that at my age they were free from these maladies.

My name, Wilfred Saint-Mandé, denotes that I have French blood in my veins, one of my ancestors having had to fly from France during the reign of terror which followed the Revolution of 1789. This ancestor, Henri de Saint-Mandé, belonged to the lesser nobility but was a true friend of the people. A painting of him, which is still preserved, shows a tall, dark young man of striking appearance. A mass of dark curly hair is brushed back revealing a noble forehead. The eyes are perhaps the most impressive feature. Under black straight brows they reveal courage and intelligence of a high order. The nose is straight, while the mouth and chin denote a nature that is refined, determined, and yet gentle.

Henri de Saint-Mandé welcomed the Revolution and did all in his power to ensure the political emancipation of the proletariat with a minimum of bloodshed. As an officer in the army, he had to choose between being an *émigré* and fighting for the Revolution. He took the latter course and distinguished himself at Valmy and Jemappes. In the second of these battles he stormed the Austrian lines at the head of his men and was severely wounded, losing his right arm, which had to be amputated at the elbow.

In spite of a clumsy sawbones who did his best to live up to his reputation as a murderer, Henri made a remarkably quick recovery and was soon able to go out with his stump in a sling. As soon as he was fit enough to leave hospital he went for convalescence to his family in the Boulevard St.-Germain, where he was received with great joy.

His parents, together with his two sisters, were living in daily dread of arrest. They were suspects, and every movement was watched by Danton's spies.

On August 10, 1793, early in the morning, a loud knocking was heard at the door. The servant who opened it rushed upstairs in terror and announced that the whole family was to be arrested. It was just before dawn, and the scoundrels at the door were enough to strike terror into the hearts of the strongest. They were dressed in ragged uniforms and armed with pikes, swords and pistols.

With impudent and boastful language the leader of the ruffians flourished his warrant and in a few minutes the cursed aristocrats were being marched away to the vast prison known as the Conciergerie. Henri's father was a tall man of dignified carriage. He walked bare-headed; and his grey hair, fine broad forehead and handsome features denoted a race above that of the half-drunken guards whose brutal faces and stupid expressions betrayed slum dwellers.

The old noble had served with distinction in the Seven Years' War and bled for France at Rosbach. His wife and daughters were of medium height, slim and distinguished-looking. They had never taken any part in politics, and at the beginning of the Revolution were without any apprehensions concerning their future safety. But gradually danger closed in round them until, for some days before their arrest, their house had been closely watched.

On reaching the prison, father and son were placed in one room, mother and daughters in another. The former found themselves in a long low room about five metres wide and twenty-five long. It contained some fifty prisoners, most of whom were nobles, although a few inmates were in wretched rags and were obviously poor illiterate

town-workers and peasants. For some reason or other they had incurred the wrath of Danton and were to pay the penalty:

Surely no greater human courage has ever been shown than that which these aristocrats displayed during their incarceration. By bribing the jailer they were able to obtain necessities and even small luxuries from outside. Their good breeding, haughty mien, and polished manners never deserted them. Henri and his father were introduced, by a prisoner who appeared to be the master of ceremonies, to a group who were discussing the seventeenth-century French drama. One speaker declared Racine to be the greatest dramatist of that great age, for the supreme melody and harmony of his verse, the penetration of his psychology and his ability to create living characters endowed with passions, for the simplicity, beauty and majesty of his tragedies.

"That may be," replied a youthful count, who had been arrested merely because his name betrayed his rank; "but Racine is too much wrapped up in the preoccupations of love. His liaisons with du Parc, la Champmesle and others show how weak he was, how lacking in virility. Corneille is the man who appeals to me, for he portrays men who are possessed of vigorous wills and who can overcome the passions inspired by love. He shows us the *point d'honneur* and creates men who are masters of their fate, not tossed about like corks on the tempestuous seas of love, for love is an abject passion, and its slaves are in truth capable of any monstrous deed."

And so the discussions went on. They discussed painting, poetry, and art in general as if they were in the splendid palace of Versailles, surrounded by pomp and luxury, instead of in a foul prison with a few days at most before their proud heads would drop into the basket.

The following day Henri and his father were taken before a court composed largely of the rabble of Paris. The old man was sentenced to death immediately, for it had been proved that he was preparing to fly the country. The proof existed only in the minds of his accusers, but no arguments would convince them of their error. Henri

felt too sick at heart to plead, after hearing his father's fate, but a tall, cadaverous individual announced to the court that inquiries were being made, and in a few days, without any doubt, proof would be forthcoming that the young man was a spy in disguise. It was alleged also that his military service was merely to obtain information for the allies, who were trying desperately to crush the great and noble Revolution which would cause liberty, equality and fraternity to reign among men for ever.

Henri was therefore told that he was remanded for three days, which would no doubt be sufficient time for false evidence to be fabricated. The young man (he was but twenty-five) was led away and locked up in a small room with one other prisoner, already condemned to death and expecting to be executed on the morrow. This man was white-haired and at least sixty years of age. He had been employed at the court of Louis XVI, and had accompanied the king and his family during their flight from Paris. All had gone well until they reached Sainte-Menehould, where Louis forgot prudence and, trusting to his disguise as a valet, had looked out of the carriage window. The postmaster, Drouet, had immediately recognized the monarch and raised the alarm. A strong guard escorted them back to Paris, where, as all the world knows, Louis was executed on January 21, 1793, and his wife some months later, on October 16, to be precise. It is curious to reflect how different the history of France might have been had Louis not stuck his head out of a carriage window.

The old prisoner, Pierre de Chatellus, like a true philosopher, remained unmoved by his impending fate, or betrayed no emotion, whatever may have been going on in his mind. He was reading the "Essais" of Montaigne and praised the author for enduring his attacks of gravel with so much fortitude. That led the old man to discuss the author's stoicism and its sources. Henri thought that the stoic philosophy originated with the Romans.

"No," was the reply, "it is neither wholly Roman nor wholly Greek."

Next dawn the massive door rattled and creaked, revealing a waiting escort. The condemned man had not ceased

reading all night and was smiling as if the suspense was nearly over.

"Adieu, my young friend," said he. "Be of good cheer! The next world cannot be worse than this, and, if it exists at all, for us it must be better. Out of all this welter of blood a better day will dawn; France will yet recover her sanity and take her rightful place among the great nations of the world. I wish I could help you; but alas, what can I do? All we can do is to die bravely, to show these miserable ones that they may destroy the body, but the soul they cannot conquer . . . Adieu." His hand was firm when it gripped Henri's, and they embraced gravely, with dignity.

All that long day Henri tried to read, to write, to forget the fate that awaited him. All in vain. The clamour of the mob without, the frequent jangling of keys, the heavy footsteps in the corridor, all these noises and many others kept his thoughts fixed on his terrible plight.

Although he had resolved not to do so for fear of breaking down entirely, he searched in his jacket and drew out from a secret place (which had been overlooked when he was searched) a portrait of the girl he loved. She was, or appeared to be, four or five years younger than he and extremely beautiful. Her large eyes, straight nose and full, red lips, slightly parted to show white gleaming teeth, revealed a passionate, tender nature. Her mother was Greek and the daughter inherited that perfect beauty which, whether in a flower or a face, compels our admiration.

Sadly he replaced the picture, and again intense gloom like a blanket enveloped him completely. He tried to deceive himself by saying that we all have to die one day or another and therefore what do a few years matter in the history of the world? But his passionate yearning for life, for sunshine, love and happiness, was too strong and he wept bitterly, his body shaken by convulsive sobs.

After many hours the jailer came to the grating and announced that a visitor wished to see the prisoner. Henri pulled himself together with an effort and walked towards the door. Almost immediately the face of his betrothed appeared behind the bars. She was extremely pale and

was obviously mastering her emotion with great difficulty. The guard watched them closely and listened intently to the conversation, which had therefore to be quite banal. Besides, they were too overcome with emotion to say much. The joy of meeting was completely drowned in the sea of grief that engulfed them.

"Come along, mademoiselle, time's up," shouted the turnkey at last, in a harsh voice. "Kiss your little one and leave him to his thoughts until he meets the widow," and he laughed with satisfaction at the thought of another enemy of the people losing his proud head. Marguerite, Henri's fiancée, looked as if she were going to collapse utterly, but by a supreme effort of will pulled herself together and drew nearer to the bars to take a last farewell of her lover. Their lips met and the prisoner felt something being pushed into his mouth. For an instant he was startled, but realized that there must be some good reason for such an act, and managed to draw the object into his mouth without arousing the suspicion of the jailer, who cried out after a moment:

"Name of God, are you going to keep on embracing all day? Come on, my girl, away with you."

The girl looked at her fiancé, her expression denoting terror mingled with resignation. Then she uttered a sob and fainted. Two men carried her away.

For hours Henri was incapable of thought or act. Then he dashed himself repeatedly against the door until his body was bruised and aching. Finally he staggered to his sack of straw and threw himself down.

When he grew calmer he went to a corner of the room where some light fell from the small barred aperture and examined the object which Marguerite had slipped into his mouth and which he had secreted in his pocket. It was a small steel tube. Inside was a piece of paper and a fine chain saw of exquisite workmanship, which when unrolled was about a foot long. On the paper was a message written in tiny characters, which read:

*To my darlingest fiancé. Try to saw through the bars.  
To-night at twelve, friends will be outside and will throw*

*something in at your window. Be of good cheer. All my love, Marguerite.*

The young man uttered a fervent prayer for success and was confident that with a little good luck he ought to cut through two bars before midnight.

The corridor outside his room was long and every step was heard distinctly. As his cell was at the end of a passage, the janitor frequently turned and retraced his steps without taking the trouble to look inside. The prisoner tried to read a book he had been allowed to bring with him. It was the "Meditations of Marcus Aurelius." He turned idly over the pages until he reached these words: "A branch cut off from the adjacent branch must of necessity be cut off from the whole tree also. So, too, a man when he is separated from another man has fallen off from the whole social community. Now as to a branch, another cuts it off, but a man by his own act separates himself from his neighbour, when he hates him, and turns away from him; and he does not know that he has at the same time cut himself off from the whole social system."

"Alas," murmured the young man, "I, who have done no wrong, am cut off from my fellow-men and condemned to die a criminal's death. The State is cutting off all who, by accident of birth, are aristocratic. Why should we suffer for the misdeeds of our ancestors? We are not responsible for the stupidity and avarice of kings, for the defects of the constitution."

Dusk had gradually been creeping over Paris, and when nine o'clock boomed through the still air all was dark. The jailer came and asked the young man if he wanted a light.

"No, thank you," replied Henri, "I am going to lie down and try to sleep."

He thought it better to work in the dark, and in case of need he had his predecessor's improvised lamp and means of lighting it. When the last steps had died away he carried the rough table to the wall, stood on it, and was able to reach the bars. His heart leapt for joy as he examined them and saw they were old and excessively



rusty. Thank God, it seemed possible to cut them. He smeared one with some fat scraped from the plate and prepared his saw.

By means of a piece of string he was able to fix one end of the implement to the stump of his left arm and soon was cutting through the bar. When a faint squeak was heard he rubbed more fat on the saw, and redoubled his efforts. After an hour's strenuous exertions the bar was severed at the base. Heaving at it with all the strength of his young muscular frame, he wrenched and struggled until the cement loosened at the top, and out came the bar. He was streaming with sweat, his hand was cut and his whole frame ached; but what did it matter when it promised freedom, sunshine and the open air, love, a new life?

The second bar was attacked after a respite, but suddenly footsteps, the heavy hateful tread of the jailer, sounded near his door once more. The prisoner pushed the severed bar back into place, jumped down, carried the table away to the other side of the room, and lay down as if asleep.

The guard peeped through the grating in the door and seemed suspicious. Henri's heart throbbed and he shivered in spite of his efforts to appear calm. The sentry appeared finally satisfied that all was well and went away. When the prisoner judged it safe to do so, he was back at work on the second bar, which appeared harder than the first, and only yielded after a long struggle.

It was now half-past eleven and the half-hour that had to pass seemed interminable. At last twelve strokes boomed out from the great bell high over his head, and at the same time something hit the centre bar of the cell. The object fell back into the street. Quickly Henri removed the two loose bars so that the thrower would have a better chance of success. After several fruitless attempts a small hard object fell into the cell. It proved to be a small iron bolt to which was tied some stout thread. The prisoner drew in carefully, and soon was drawing in thick string. In its turn the string gave way to a stout rope, thick enough to bear a man's weight. Henri tied the end securely to the remaining bar and, after arranging his rough couch

so that it appeared to a casual observer as if a man were sleeping in it, climbed feet first through the aperture over the table and began to wonder if his body would pass. Happily he was of slim and athletic build. Even so he had to struggle very hard to pass through. His mutilated arm hampered him considerably, but his strength and determination triumphed.

Once outside, the descent of the rope was the work of a moment. At the foot of the wall were three strange men who informed him that they had a carriage near-by and were going to drive to the coast near Dieppe, where a fishing-smack would be waiting to take Henri to England.

"I shall never abandon my people," declared the young man. "How could anyone imagine that I could be guilty of such cowardice? I must either save them or go back to my fate."

"Be calm," answered one of the men, "they are already on their way to England."

"Give me your word of honour," answered the escaped prisoner, "or I will not move a step."

"O God in heaven," growled the second man, "do you want us all to be arrested? The lady who hired us said you would obey all orders for her sake. Look." He produced a sheet of paper on which was scribbled:

*Ask no questions and do all that these men tell you. We shall meet in London. Marguerite.*

Quickly they hurried to a carriage which was waiting near the Place Dauphin, in a dark side-street. Henri was made to change his clothes and put on some ragged garments. They drove for an hour, avoiding main streets as far as possible and reached a small farm on the outskirts of the city. It was dark and silent. A rough cart stood in the yard and it was laden with manure. One of the companions explained to Henri what had to be done. The manure was shovelled away at the top, and revealed a box. This appeared to be a coffin and had a hole in the top.

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"Now, monsieur, you lie in there," ordered one of the rescuers; "we fix one end of this pipe to the lid of the

coffin. The other end just comes to the surface of the manure so that you will be able to breathe, *hein?* "

As Henri appeared to hesitate, the leader of the trio broke into a volley of frightful oaths, calling heaven and hell and all their denizens to witness the foolishness of this young aristocrat whom they were trying to rescue while he was doing his best to waste time: "Better in a coffin alive than in one dead and without your head!" And the three roared with laughter at the sally.

Henri climbed into the coffin, the lid was fastened down, the tube screwed into position, and the manure carefully piled so that the top of the heap was slightly concave and the end of the tube invisible from the ground.

The journey commenced and the poor wretch in the cart had a most uncomfortable time. It was impossible to move, his hand was bleeding from his exertions with the saw in the cell and his whole body ached. In spite of the jolting of the vehicle he soon sank into a deep sleep.

The cart rumbled on for hours and finally stopped at an *octroi*, a wayside customs-house outside some town.

"Halt, *citoyens*, what have you there?" cried an authoritative voice.

"Alas, nothing of any great price," was the reply; "only a load of manure for Monsieur Gaumont at La Chapelle."

The owner of the voice was apparently quite familiar with the district and its inhabitants. The two officials at the barrier appeared to be discussing whether they should search among the dung for hidden royalists.

"No," said one in a loud voice. "How could any man conceal himself for hours under a load of manure and yet live? It is not possible."

"Well, they do strange things," replied his companion. "Do you not remember the cursed aristocrat we discovered only a few days ago dressed like an old hag and nailed up in an orange box with fruit carefully packed round him? Or the one we fished out the day before, more dead than alive, from under a load of melons?"

"That may be," retorted the other; "but manure is heavy and warm. One could not live under it."

They walked round the cart, stabbed the contents with their swords, which crossed about two inches above the coffin, just missing the air-pipe.

"Nothing hidden there," said one official to the other, while scribbling a few words on a scrap of paper to show that the cart had been examined. He charged a small sum as tax and apologized for delaying the men on the cart.

After many more hours of rough jolting the cart stopped once more. Henri heard someone scrape the top layer off the manure, take off the pipe, and open the lid.

"We are just outside Rouen," said the man in a low voice. "We rest here a few hours and go on again at daybreak."

The fresh air and gleaming stars seemed strangely unreal to the man lying in the coffin, stiff, racked with pain, and almost suffocated. He filled his lungs with the pure clean air and tried to get out of the cart. He found he could not stand without support, but gradually he recovered the use of his limbs and followed his three guides into a wretched tumbledown cottage. A slatternly old woman was preparing a meal, and paid no attention to Henri. The kitchen was fairly clean but ramshackle. Two or three chairs, in various stages of decrepitude, stood round a table roughly made of cheap deal boards. The coffee tasted like nectar to the exhausted young man, and the bread and meat were eaten with a keener relish than any luxurious banquet could have evoked in happier days.

A bottle of *eau-de-vie* was passed round, and after taking a good drink Henri asked where he could lie down. He was shown an outhouse with plenty of straw, and there the guide explained that it was dangerous to sleep in the cottage, for spies were everywhere, and the slightest untoward happening would bring a search-party.

"You see, so many aristocrats pass this way, but few reach the sea. Of those who do, most are recaptured, for they get careless and try to board a boat during the day. At night it is easy enough, for few *patrons* of fishing-boats are averse to earning a handful of louis."

Henri threw himself on the straw, prayed for his be-

## CHAPTER II

THE address was found without much difficulty and Henri was shown into a comfortably furnished salon.

After a little delay Monsieur Kohler appeared. He was a little old man with keen, sparkling eyes, and in spite of his age appeared as alert and active as a young man.

He welcomed Henri with simple cordiality, and told him he hoped soon to have good news of the prisoners left behind in France. He explained further that he was an old friend of Marguerite's family, and added :

" You are a lucky fellow to have such a fiancée. Mademoiselle Marguerite de Retz is a girl in a million. She planned your escape, and got into touch with men who were willing to get you to England for a consideration. But what a consideration ! Good God ! It must have cost her half her fortune, which was considerable. Well, you are to stay here for the present. Make yourself comfortable, and you have full liberty to go and come as you please. I have here a letter and a small package which I am to hand over to you."

Henri took the articles and was shown to a large room which he was told was to be his.

It was a bedroom with a couple of easy-chairs and some fine pictures. He eagerly opened the letter as soon as he was alone, and read the contents, which ran as follows :

*My own darling fiancé,*

*You will, I pray, be out of danger when this reaches you. You must not, under any pretext, try to return to France. You could do no good and would probably lose your life, for spies are everywhere and your description will have been circulated. Should the fates be kind I shall meet you in London soon. If it is not to be . . . If I fall a victim to the*

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lust for blood which is sweeping over our dear country, why, do not grieve. Think of me sometimes in better days. Whatever happens I shall never regret what I have done. I have, I trust, saved your life and proved my love. Should the need arise I can die happy in that knowledge.

*Je suis jeune il est vrai ; mais aux âmes bien nées  
La valeur n'attend point le nombre des années.*

*It may be that the clouds will roll away and soon we shall be reunited to realize those daydreams which flitted like butterflies in the forest of Fontainebleau. I kiss your lips, Adieu. Marguerite.*

Henri walked about the room in a fury of despair. He felt like rushing back to France, to rescue his loved ones or to share their fate. Then he opened the package and found a number of keepsakes and heirlooms that his fiancée intimated were to be kept until her arrival, or, in the event of her death, for ever.

For some days he was sombre and taciturn, but gradually under the encouraging words of Monsieur Kohler he became more cheerful, or at least feigned cheerfulness, and explored the city in the neighbourhood of the merchant's house.

Monsieur Kohler was a successful wine-merchant and held in high esteem as a man of sterling integrity. Henri spent long hours reading in his room.

After a fortnight of anxiety and impatient waiting, Monsieur Kohler came into Henri's room one evening, and seemed to have aged ten years in a few hours. The young man, with that strange premonition which sometimes warns us of great disasters, felt his heart beat as if it would burst, while the blood surged and thumped in his temples. The old man dropped into a chair and groaned : " O God, help me to break this awful news."

Henri was standing rigid in the middle of the room, his head erect and fists clenched. He was as pale as death but outwardly calm. " Tell me all, I beg you," he said to his host ; " keep nothing back, better know the worst than harbour any foolish hopes."

" Ah, pauvre garçon, que je te plains ! " replied Monsieur Kohler.



trothed who had risked all to help his escape, and for his family.

He fell into a fitful sleep and dreamt he was back in his cell, awaiting the call to execution. It was so realistic that, when one of the men came to tell him it was time to be off, the dreamer jumped up thinking his last moment had come. It was three o'clock in the morning. An early start had to be made because they were going to avoid the main road, which meant that instead of the usual 55 kilometres they were to do 90, so that even with a double relay of horses it would take at least twenty hours. Ruefully, after a quick wash and a hasty meal, Henri climbed back into the coffin, was covered up, and without further delay they were off. Hour after hour passed, the horse jogged up hill and then down.

After many hours the horse was changed, and towards nightfall one of the men whispered down the tube that they were nearing the sea. Henri was aware that daylight was fading, for the small circle of light in his prison was disappearing. They avoided the town until dark, and then entered some neglected and deserted-looking yard. It appeared to be at the side of an inn. Once more Henri found he could not stand, and once more he gradually recovered the use of his legs.

He was led into a room at the back of the inn and there saw two new-comers; one obviously a seafaring man, the other a commanding personage of middle age, who introduced himself to Henri, and presented Monsieur Boncourt, the skipper of the barque *Saint-Jean*, after which he said:

"I congratulate you on having got so far safely. You are one of the lucky ones. In an hour, if all goes well, you ought to be on board. After that I think your troubles will be practically over. Do not thank me, we do not risk our lives to save you because of any particular love we bear you, but because we have been well paid. Adieu."

Henri was given the rough clothes of a sailor, with big heavy boots. He was told to roll slightly while walking, so that the risk of detection would be minimized. He was then given several glasses of wine and some *eau-de-*

*vie* which had the effect of making him completely drunk. He had not meant to drink too much, but the physical pain and mental anguish were so acute that he welcomed some respite, no matter how it was obtained. Finally he was admonished to keep his tongue between his teeth and, if questioned, to swear that he was a member of the crew.

They reached the quay safely, climbed on board, and were soon under way. The crossing was calm and uneventful so that at dawn they ran into Dover.

Henri was given new clothes and a sum of money, then put ashore with as little fuss as possible. Fortunately he had had an English tutor for years as a boy, and had no difficulty in understanding and speaking simple English, although it was obvious to the most casual observer that his accent was French. He obtained a seat in the London coach, and after a few hours of fast and fairly comfortable travelling found himself in London. He had the address of a French merchant who resided near St. Paul's.

## CHAPTER II

THE address was found without much difficulty and Henri was shown into a comfortably furnished salon.

After a little delay Monsieur Kohler appeared. He was a little old man with keen, sparkling eyes, and in spite of his age appeared as alert and active as a young man.

He welcomed Henri with simple cordiality, and told him he hoped soon to have good news of the prisoners left behind in France. He explained further that he was an old friend of Marguerite's family, and added :

" You are a lucky fellow to have such a fiancée. Mademoiselle Marguerite de Retz is a girl in a million. She planned your escape, and got into touch with men who were willing to get you to England for a consideration. But what a consideration ! Good God ! It must have cost her half her fortune, which was considerable. Well, you are to stay here for the present. Make yourself comfortable, and you have full liberty to go and come as you please. I have here a letter and a small package which I am to hand over to you."

Henri took the articles and was shown to a large room which he was told was to be his.

It was a bedroom with a couple of easy-chairs and some fine pictures. He eagerly opened the letter as soon as he was alone, and read the contents, which ran as follows :

*My own darling fiancé,*

*You will, I pray, be out of danger when this reaches you. You must not, under any pretext, try to return to France. You could do no good and would probably lose your life, for spies are everywhere and your description will have been circulated. Should the fates be kind I shall meet you in London soon. If it is not to be . . . If I fall a victim to the*

lust for blood which is sweeping over our dear country, why, do not grieve. Think of me sometimes in better days. Whatever happens I shall never regret what I have done. I have, I trust, saved your life and proved my love. Should the need arise I can die happy in that knowledge.

*Je suis jeune il est vrai ; mais aux âmes bien nées  
La valeur n'attend point le nombre des années.*

*It may be that the clouds will roll away and soon we shall be reunited to realize those daydreams which flitted like butterflies in the forest of Fontainebleau. I kiss your lips, Adieu. Marguerite.*

Henri walked about the room in a fury of despair. He felt like rushing back to France, to rescue his loved ones or to share their fate. Then he opened the package and found a number of keepsakes and heirlooms that his fiancée intimated were to be kept until her arrival, or, in the event of her death, for ever.

For some days he was sombre and taciturn, but gradually under the encouraging words of Monsieur Kohler he became more cheerful, or at least feigned cheerfulness, and explored the city in the neighbourhood of the merchant's house.

Monsieur Kohler was a successful wine-merchant and held in high esteem as a man of sterling integrity. Henri spent long hours reading in his room.

After a fortnight of anxiety and impatient waiting, Monsieur Kohler came into Henri's room one evening, and seemed to have aged ten years in a few hours. The young man, with that strange premonition which sometimes warns us of great disasters, felt his heart beat as if it would burst, while the blood surged and thumped in his temples. The old man dropped into a chair and groaned : " O God, help me to break this awful news."

Henri was standing rigid in the middle of the room, his head erect and fists clenched. He was as pale as death but outwardly calm. " Tell me all, I beg you," he said to his host ; " keep nothing back, better know the worst than harbour any foolish hopes."

" Ah, pauvre garçon, que je te plains ! " replied Monsieur Kohler.

"Never mind pitying me," almost snarled his young companion, rendered harsh and brusque by anxiety; "come on, can't you see I must know?"

With a visible effort the old man pulled himself together and told his story. The gist of it was that all Henri's family and Marguerite had been executed. His fiancée had been suspected, and arrested immediately after her lover's flight had been detected. She bore herself with admirable courage at the trial, and when sentenced to death was the calmest woman in the hall. She was invited to swear on oath that she had not helped her lover to escape.

"Do you think I would perjure my soul to obtain a short respite from people mad with blood, who have no sense of equity left?" she cried in ringing tones. "Yes, I did help my lover to escape, and thank God he succeeded in getting out of this country where it is a crime to be of noble birth, or even to be refined in manners and dress, where a mob of disreputable *canaille* sway the tribunals and intimidate the jury who dare not acquit a single prisoner."

"*À mort! À mort!*" cried the rabble, who crowded the courthouse, and who came daily with their knitting and mending, with their brats and coarse vulgar jeers, for the immense joy of seeing the hated nobles sentenced to death. And who can blame them? Had they not been crushed down for centuries by the *corvées*, *gabelle*, iniquitous exactions of all kinds, to keep a profligate clergy and corrupt nobility in luxury and idleness?

Marguerite was sentenced to death and rushed back to prison. She wrote a long letter to her lover, and by bribing a jailer was able to get it sent to its destination through the kindness of the Paris branch of Monsieur Kohler's business. On the following day she was taken in a *tombereau* with several other condemned people.

Like Madame Roland she was even able to give some courage to those of her companions who needed it. Just before the knife fell she addressed the spectators and said: "I have done no wrong. It is not wrong to help one's lover to escape when he has fought for his country and been unjustly condemned. What I have done I would do

again, and I rejoice in the knowledge that we aristocrats can still teach the people how to die." She was prevented from saying any more, for murmurs of pity rose from the throng to see such a young and beautiful girl being put to death. The authorities feared perhaps that a movement of sympathy would start in the fickle mob and that it would be difficult to check. The huge knife gleamed red in the air, still dripping with the blood of the previous victim. The girl was fastened on the wooden horizontal frame so that her neck was in position under the blade. The catch was released, the knife slid down the grooves with a horrible grating noise, and the head fell into the basket below. One of the hirelings on duty at the instrument picked the head up by the hair, spat in the dead face and cried: "*Ainsi périssent toutes les ennemies de la Révolution!*"

When old Monsieur Kohler had finished his tale, Henri pulled out a pistol which had lain concealed in a drawer near the bed, put it to his head and fired. He fell in a heap on the floor, while smoke rose from the pistol and blood ran from the wound on to the carpet. The old man uttered a cry of horror, fell on his knees before the prostrate figure and examined the wound. Blood gushed out of the hole in little spurts, and the edges were scorched and blackened owing to the weapon having been held very close to the head. A doctor was quickly summoned and he looked grave as he carried out his examination.

"Unless I am mistaken," he said quietly after probing the injury, "this young man is both lucky and unlucky. He missed the brain in his agitation, but has severed the optic nerves, and if he recovers, as I expect he will, he will be blind for life."

Henri was speedily removed to a hospital where an operation was immediately performed and the bullet extracted. After a few days the doctor came to see Monsieur Kohler and said:

"It is as I thought. He will recover, but his sight has been destroyed."

As soon as practicable Henri was removed to Monsieur Kohler's house and nursed with great devotion. The old man addressed no word of reproach to the patient. He

was simply more sympathetic than before, if possible ; and his daughter, Jeanne, spent nearly all her time at the wounded man's bedside.

Jeanne was twenty-one years and looked younger. She was also extremely pretty, with fair curly hair. Below medium height, she had a perfect figure, and a charming manner. These advantages, coupled with the fact that she was the only daughter of a rich wine-merchant, caused her to be much sought after by the young men with whom she came into contact.

She had been educated in Paris, but was fortunately in London when the Revolution broke out. The results of her education were that she displayed some musical talent, and could converse agreeably in English and Italian, as well as in French, of course, but knew less about life than the urchin who ran errands for her father. As she stood at the side of the sick-bed, the setting sun imparted to her hair the tint beech-leaves sometimes have, something between bronze and gold. Her features were regular and she had a dimple on her left cheek which deepened when she laughed, and lent to her expression something delightfully roguish.

When Henri came to the house she avoided him as much as possible, for he was irritable and taciturn, as was perfectly natural in the circumstances. After his attempt at suicide she nursed him with an exemplary devotion, and really was the means of preventing his death. He did not want to live, and at first schemed to throw himself out of the window, stick something in his wound or take poison. But Jeanne watched him closely and he was too weak to do much. After many days, when he appeared a little stronger, he asked her if she would read the letter from Marguerite. Jeanne took it from the place indicated, opened it, and read in a voice that was beautifully clear, yet which trembled with emotion :

*My darling fiancé,*

*When this reaches you I shall have gone to my long rest. I have just been condemned and have but two days to live. I am not afraid, as you see my handwriting is quite steady,*

but heart-broken at leaving you. Gone are the wonderful walks in the Fontainebleau forest, the butterflies we chased but never caught, the dreams of our home and little ones who would bring joy to us in our later years. No more shall I thrill at the touch of your lips and hear you whisper "Je t'aime . . ." Sometimes I wonder why we should have been born in this generation rather than in any other. Why should we be cut down in the springtime of life, why all this cruelty and these murders should be. It may be that there is a purpose in it all, that France will be a better place after having been washed in blood. One cannot really blame these poor people. They were terribly oppressed and lived in wretched misery. They were severely punished for killing a rabbit or a bird, and their hovels were like the lairs of wild beasts. Their clothing was like that of scarecrows.

The serfs have thrown off the yoke and, like an infuriated bull which has broken its chain and dashes madly into the crowd, so these people, after centuries of suffering, have resolved to kill, plunder, burn and destroy until their fury is exhausted.

Do not grieve unduly for me. There is but one request I wish to make, and that is that you live and try to do something to alleviate poverty and suffering. Your name will be on my lips when the moment comes to bow my head. Our love is deep and strong and pure, and, strange as it may appear, helps me to die.

There were twenty-four women in this room when I arrived. At present there are sixteen. Twelve have been taken away and four have arrived. Most of them are full of courage, and as careful of their appearance as if they were in their boudoir. One told the turnkey to drop his surly and arrogant tone, to speak humbly as a menial to his superiors. They discuss art and literature. One girl has a viola, two have violins, and all play most sweetly. There is a piano here too, and several ladies play beautifully. We are allowed to have anything we like sent in from outside, and so are quite comfortable. They have just played Bach's Concerto for two violins in D minor. It always succeeds in calming me when I am irritable or fretful.

How I would like to drink the hemlock like Socrates, and



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*just lie down on my couch and die with dignity. You remember the words of Cicero which we translated at school without understanding their meaning :*

*The death of the young seems to me to resemble the sudden extinction of a flame with volumes of water ; the old seem rather to die as a fire which flickers out of itself.*

*It is hard to die when one is healthy and strong, straining like a hound at the leash to run the course of life. Adieu. I fear if I write more I shall break down completely, and I want to be brave . . .*

When Jeanne had finished reading, Henri lay quite still for a long time and then said, " Now that you have read that letter don't you realize why I want to die ? "

" Yes," answered Jeanne, " but don't forget you must obey the injunction contained in it and live. You must live, hard as it may be, because it is her last wish."

As the months passed, Jeanne and Henri became inseparable. One evening, about two years after Henri's arrival, he and Jeanne were together in the sitting-room, and had been silent for some time. The girl saw a red rose growing outside the open window. She picked it and brought it to her companion. He took it and her hand too, drawing her slightly towards him.

" Jeanne," he said in a low voice, " I shall have to go away."

" Why ? " asked the girl, taken by surprise.

" Because I have learnt to love you and cannot ask you to marry me."

" Why cannot you ? " asked Jeanne.

" Because you cannot throw yourself away on a blind man."

" No, I will not throw myself away on a blind man, but I can help him to live, can share his joys and sorrows, and make the darkness weigh on him less heavily."

Henri drew her more closely to him and their lips met in a kiss that sealed their troth.

A few years later old Monsieur Kohler died, and the young couple found themselves his sole heirs. Henri, to his great surprise, recovered the bulk of his family's fortune, and so

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they realized their ambition of helping, on a fairly extensive scale, those less fortunately situated than themselves. They published tracts, which may have done some good, but probably did not. Part of their money was devoted to the education of destitute children. This was something more practical, and probably bore better fruit.

Henri died at the end of 1840, and Jeanne six years later. They left one son and two daughters whose history we need not follow. The Saint-Mandé family, in spite of a good deal of philanthropy, remained prosperous throughout the nineteenth century, and never deserted the wine business in London, which is still to-day one of the most important in the country.

### CHAPTER III

I LEFT school at the end of June, 1914, and went to spend a holiday with my grandmother and an aunt who lived in Dundee. They were worthy people, but extremely pious and rather narrow-minded. No cooking was done on Sunday, and all amusements were strictly barred. When I wanted to smoke I had to do it in the lavatory, or in my room at night, blowing the smoke out of the window. The atmosphere in the house was chilly and one dared not indulge in a hearty laugh. My aunt acted as chaperon, and it was almost impossible to get out of her sight. Sometimes I gave her the slip, and roamed about alone. I longed for romance, and every pretty girl fanned the flame of sexual desire which burnt fiercely within me. It seems to me both stupid and hypocritical to deny the power and persistence of the sexual impulse.

One day, during my stay at Dundee, I went into town with my aunt to do some shopping. While she was busy in some store, I strolled away and walked down to the river, where I got on the ferry-boat and went across to Newport. This seemed a pretty residential place, and I had a delightful time exploring the neighbourhood.

Before returning, I went into an Italian shop and had some ice-cream. It was a nice clean place with flowers on the tables. The name was over the door. The proprietor's daughter was a pretty dark girl of about my age. She came and spoke to me in broken English, and I answered in my best Italian, which was anything but good. She was delighted, and spoke so fast in her mother tongue that I understood nothing at all.

However, she didn't mind that as long as she could speak to someone who would listen while she praised her country and her people. Her land was the most wonderful in the

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world, its skies more blue than others, its buildings more beautiful.

When I recited to her the famous sonnet of Filicaia, beginning :

*Italia, Italia, oh tu cui feo la sorte  
Dono infelice di bellezza, onde hai  
Funesta dote d'infiniti guai,  
Che in fronte scritti per gran doglia porte ;*

she rushed at me impulsively, and kissed me on the cheek, exclaiming : "*O, Ella conosce mia patria !*"

It was late when I returned to my relatives, and on the way I tried to invent a good excuse for my absence. I feared my grandmother, she had all her life been so puritanic, that the slightest deviation from her standards meant nothing short of disgrace. More from bravado than anything else, I told her what had happened. She was horrified, especially at my scandalous behaviour in the Italian shop, and preached a long sermon to me in her severest tones about the narrow path wherein we must tread to find salvation, and the wide path leading down to hell. For several days after the incident I refrained from causing her any further annoyance, but finally I could stand it no longer.

What annoyed me beyond endurance was the tacit agreement that appeared to exist between the two women, that I was not to go out alone. They still seemed to regard me as the small boy who played on the floor with a ball or tin soldiers. One Saturday afternoon I strolled out into the garden after lunch, put on my cap, which had been rolled up in my pocket, and walked away into town. I climbed up a hill which I think is known as the Law Hill, but soon tired of it. It is neither beautiful nor interesting. Soon I wandered down to the river and found a pleasure-steamer that was going to Perth and back. Perth is my mother's birthplace, she often spoke of it, and the desire to see the place was irresistible, so I bought a ticket and went on the boat, which started soon afterwards. There were about thirty people on board. A man and a girl sang, the accompaniment being supplied by guitars, which they played

with much skill. They were itinerant musicians, and after the performance came round, holding out a hat for contributions. The girl must have had gipsy blood in her. She was very handsome, with dark flashing eyes. Her body swayed as she sang, and she fascinated me as she sang "Eileen Alanah." The scene was most peaceful, nothing breaking the silence save the swish of the water against the boat's sides. A gentle breeze was blowing up the river, and the wooded slopes on each side rose majestically from the water's edge.

As the words of the old song rang out clear and melodious, I felt, for some strange reason, inexpressibly sad. I was vaguely aware that the beauty of the scene and the voice of the singer were stirring responsive chords in me, and I began to realize for the first time what Keats meant in his "Ode to a Nightingale." We had often read the poem at school, and had even paraphrased it, without really understanding the poet's emotion, although we could dissect it glibly enough and pretend to explain things that only people who know something about life can possibly understand.

The journey back to Dundee was soon over, and I reached my grandmother's house at about half-past seven. It is many years ago now, but I shall never forget the scene that took place. Out of respect for my father's mother, I allowed her acid tongue to give me a severe and unjust castigation. When she had finished, I understood that I was to return home since I could not behave as a gentleman should. I looked at myself in the glass as the sentence was being delivered and saw that I was pale with anger. My grandmother was a little old woman, frail-looking, but extremely dictatorial and dogmatic. After dinner I went upstairs to my room, leaving the two women to inveigh against modern youth, his lack of moral, religious, and various other kinds of senses.

I sat in a wicker-chair facing the window, and watched the sun set in exquisite splendour over the hills. I was restless and knew not why. Perhaps the prospect of a humdrum scholastic life didn't appeal to me overmuch. Literature has always been my joy and it seemed to me that

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business, commercial competition, city office or shop life would drive me mad. At the back of my mind was the intention to become a professor, so that in the long vacations I would have time to travel, to see strange peoples, jot down impressions, and refuse to be crushed down by what we euphemistically term civilization. I had seen in my father's house business men who made money and success their gods. They are like moles. The beauty of a sunset, the wind in the tree tops on a hill, the flashing of a white sail on the distant blue depths, all such things mean nothing to them. They are vulgar and have mercenary souls.

The evening shadows drew on, darkness enveloped the town, lights twinkled in countless dwellings, and still I sat. It was as if I had a premonition of great changes to come in my life and in the lives of millions of other young men. The papers had, for some days, been printing big headlines, and it was clear that the murder at Serajevo was causing friction between Austria and Serbia. Then news came of the Russian mobilization and the possibility of further dramatic developments.

It suddenly occurred to me that I had not seen a paper that day. My grandmother was either too mean or too careless of news to buy a paper. Possibly religious scruples had something to do with it also, for she would read nothing but the Bible and some pious journals.

It was nine o'clock when I crept quietly downstairs and went out through the front door. I was in disgrace and leaving on the morrow, so couldn't make things much worse. When I reached the town I saw a big poster outside a newspaper shop. It announced in huge letters that Germany had declared war on France. I bought a paper from which I gathered that Germany had declared war on Russia the previous day. The great question was whether Britain would be drawn in also. Many people thought not, but it was obvious that Europe had the jumps and anything might happen.

Next day I caught the fast train for my home in London. The carriages were packed with soldiers, reservists going to their depots. They were laughing loudly, singing, swearing, drinking out of bottles and indulging in a good deal

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of horse-play. At intervals they sang patriotic and popular songs, played cards and brawled.

War was declared the day after my return home. I read several papers with eagerness and discovered that the Germans were out to smash civilization, violate Belgian neutrality, and let loose on Europe the most hideous frightfulness their barbaric minds could invent. I asked my father if I could enlist. He laughed loudly at such an idea, and asked me if I were joking. He said the war would be over by Christmas and there was no need to interrupt my studies. I was restless, however, and longing for adventure. It seemed a chance of a lifetime to satisfy my craving for excitement, so I at once wrote to the War Office offering my services as interpreter, for I had an excellent knowledge of French and was fairly proficient at German and Italian.

The next day there was a curious incident in a local hall. The Wesleyan parson had announced that he would lecture on "What we owe to Germany." He had courage, but seemed to me a tactless fool. My father and I went, and just as the poor man was about to start, a band of men, stalwarts of the local established church, walked up the centre of the hall waving the Union Jack and singing "God Save the King." The meeting ended in disorder and a number of free fights between the intruders and the parson's supporters. It appeared to me idiotic to acclaim what we owed to the enemy just after war had been declared. The first duty was to see the business through, and that would need all our strength, unity, energy and endurance.

For several days I lived in a state of tension. On the 10th of August, just after tea, I was upstairs lying in the bath, idly throwing the water over my chest which was covered with soap. I was fit and looked at my body with some vanity, for I was tall, perfectly proportioned, muscular, and handsome into the bargain. It is idle to pretend that such attributes do not make a young fellow vain. He is well aware of their value and counts on them to attract the eyes of the opposite sex.

As I lay in the bath, like a flash the determination came upon me to enlist at once by hook or by crook. Quickly

dressing and going downstairs, I took down my hat from the peg while my poor mother watched me with a wistful air, as if she suspected that something untoward was afoot. She asked me where I was going, and her look will haunt me as long as I live. I answered that I was going for a walk, and she seemed a little reassured and said :

"Don't be long, for you will soon be going to Oxford and I won't have you at all then."

I felt a movement of pity, but steeled myself, for I was determined, as I slipped out of the house, not to break my resolution to enlist.

I knew there was a recruiting office in the High Street, as I had often studied the pictures there of soldiers in full-dress uniform. Underneath were notices urging young men to join and see the world in such splendid company.

A crowd of men of all ages and conditions were trying to push into the entrance, and, as I was in the act of joining the throng, a big fat sergeant with a red face that looked as if it might burst any minute came to the door and bawled out :

"No more to-day. Come back to-morrow."

My heart sank, so strong was my desire, but I at once remembered that there was another recruiting office in Church Street. Thither I proceeded as fast as I could walk, and to my great joy was able to push in among the crowd just before the big doors were closed. Those inside were allowed to stay.

The office was in the centre of a rather sordid district and the crowd among whom I found myself were anything but prepossessing. Most of them appeared to be labouring men with rough, cheap clothes, cloth caps, and mufflers round their necks. Perhaps their social superiors were enlisting among more genteel surroundings or applying for commissions. I could not understand a good deal of the talk, which was largely slang and swear words. I suppose I appeared a curious figure among those rough men, for I was well dressed, wore a school tie and a new straw hat. Besides, I spoke differently, and when one man heard me say something in answer to a question, he called out to his pals :



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"Gor'blimy, lads, 'ere's a bloody Algie."

However I was determined to stick it, and followed the crowd upstairs. There I saw a large room with a table at one end at which some clerks were busy writing down the names and other particulars of candidates for His Majesty's Forces. At the other end of the room were four doctors with stethoscopes, and in front of them a line of naked men. Those of us who stood near the entrance were ordered sharply to undress. There were no pegs on the walls, so we had to drop our clothes on the dirty dusty wooden floor, on which lay the garments of the naked ones. I felt ashamed to stand among such a motley crew, most of whom exchanged the filthiest kind of badinage.

"Come on, you lads," shouted a sergeant from the other end of the long room, and a number of us walked across to the group of doctors. We underwent a most cursory examination, and were told to hop up the room on one foot and back on the other. We were told to cough and say 99 while the abdomen was examined, presumably for signs of rupture. The smell of filth and sweat was vile. Some of the men looked as if they had not bathed for weeks or even months. Their feet were filthy and their backs were covered with pimples. One fellow only seemed different. He was of my build and obviously a cut above the others socially. After I had passed the doctor and had sworn to serve the king, and his heirs and successors if necessary, I found myself alongside this fellow, and asked him what regiment he had joined.

"The Royal Field Artillery," he answered with a smile.

"Is there any special reason?" I inquired, for I knew as much as the man in the moon about the merits and demerits of the various units from which we could choose.

"Well, you see, they have horses," he answered with a smile, "and riding is better than walking. You can easily change your regiment if you tip the sergeant."

I had selected the Southern Light Infantry, because the name appealed to me. For a moment I thought of trying to change, but reflected that one unit was as good as another, so decided to stick to what I had chosen.

I was asked by a clerk when I could entrain for the depot

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and replied that I could go at once if necessary. He smiled, whether at my keenness or not I do not know, and said:

"Very well, be at the station at ten to-morrow morning. Here are your papers."

I left the room and walked home on air. When I reached home I walked proudly into the sitting-room, threw the papers on to the table, and announced that I had joined the army. Mother was sitting in an arm-chair near the window. She looked terrified as I spoke and said in a tremulous voice:

"You are joking, Wilfred."

Then she reached for her spectacles, picked up my papers, looked at them for a moment and fell back in a dead faint.

I felt wretched now that I realized how I had hurt my mother, and the exaltation I had felt while walking home gave way to a fit of depression. Father then said:

"I have a certain amount of influence and you are under age; do you want me to get you out of it?"

"No, father," I replied. "What is done is done. It won't last long, and if I don't go now I may never have the chance."

I went to my bedroom soon after eleven o'clock, leaving my parents downstairs. But I could not sleep, and lay thinking of the day's events. After a while my father came up and, without switching on the light, asked me if I was awake. When I answered him he went down on his knees and prayed long and earnestly that my life would be spared, and that I would soon return home again. Then he gave me a little Chinese image as a mascot and went away. Long after his departure I fell asleep, but not before my pillow was soaked with tears.

My father was not destined to see the end of the war, and I saw him only a few times after leaving for the army. He was a man in a thousand, honest, fearless in defence of what he considered right, fair, just and honourable; an admirable husband and father, ever striving to inspire his children with noble ideals.

Next morning I went away and mother seemed calmer and resigned. At the station, whither father accompanied me, were a noisy crowd of recruits. Large numbers of

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relatives and friends were seeing them off. Some were drunk and reeled about the platform, with bottles in their hands, trying to dance. On the sides of the carriages huge chalk letters informed us that we were bound for Berlin. We crowded into the vehicles and just before our departure a policeman came and gave every man a shilling. I suppose this was what was known as "The King's Shilling." The compartments were so crowded that many of us had no seat and I found a precarious perch on the rack.

## CHAPTER IV

THERE was a short thick-set fellow in the compartment. He had served in the Boer War and told us tales of his adventures. He was about forty years of age, red of face, full of fun, and I at once took a liking to him. After he had had a couple of drinks he grew loquacious and told me that his name was Moltke, that he was of Prussian descent and was going to the war simply because he was tired of his job, which was teaching German in a school.

"Damn funny to think that I am going to shoot my own relatives," he said with a whimsical smile, "but I was born and brought up in England, so regard it as my home. A hundred years ago the English and Germans fought against the French, and Blücher was dragged in triumph in a carriage through the streets of Oxford. The French were execrated, and to kill as many as possible of them was a sacred duty. Now the fashion has changed. Young Germans are told that the very existence of the fatherland is threatened by secret treaties between Russia and France, England is sure that Germany is out to trample on all that humanity holds sacred and must be treated like a mad dog against which a peaceful community has been obliged to declare war. The truth is, of course, that secret diplomacy, fierce competition in armaments, widespread popular ignorance and prejudice, exacerbated by the most unscrupulous journalistic bilge, have brought Europe to a feverish condition which only blood-letting on an extensive scale will alleviate. Cursed financiers and profiteers will wax fat out of the holocaust, and parsons will bless the dear lads going to die gloriously in Flanders. What has organized Christianity done to avert this bloody massacre? Has it ever had the courage to denounce murder, whether the assassins are in uniform or not? Has it tried to impress

upon us that Christ meant what He said in the Sermon on the Mount? The modern parson couples piety and material success in such a way as to make a travesty of true piety and a god of success."

"Shut up, you bloody fool, you're drunk," vociferated a navvy lying on the floor, and who had also been drinking. "You're a bloody spy, that's what you are. Shut yer trap or I'll smash yer ugly mug."

After a journey of about seven hours we reached Pressing, a town in Lancashire. Under more normal conditions I should have been tired and dispirited after such an uncomfortable time, but I was going forth to war and everything thrilled me, even the swears and slang of the uncouth men round me. We were all excited and tumbled out of the train, eager to see the place at which we might spend days, weeks or even months. I had exactly one shilling in my pocket, for I had resolved to take no money from home and to lock up my bank-book which showed just over £200 to my credit. At the station we were formed up in fours and set out for the barracks. The distance was about two miles, and a number of comic songs were sung to enliven the march. Whenever a girl passed she was greeted with amatory declarations and noises meant to resemble kisses.

A few men dropped out and slipped into public-houses. They appeared to be old soldiers and apparently knew the ropes. When we arrived at the barracks the gate opened and a sergeant rushed out. He looked as if he were going to have a fit of apoplexy and had been drinking more than was good for him. Scowling at us he roared in the loudest voice I've ever heard:

"Where the bloody hell do you think I'm going to put all you b——s, eh?"

Nobody appearing disposed to vouchsafe a reply, he fell to cursing the swine who had been addle-brained enough to send a thousand men to a barracks already badly overcrowded. We then waited about two hours outside the gates, during which time some more of my companions disappeared into pubs. They call it sloping off. One borrowed my shilling and I never saw him again.

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Finally a N.C.O. came and ordered us to the tramway depot. We went there feeling a little less enthusiastic about Pressing, but sanguine that things would speedily be put right. When we reached the aforementioned depot we had a further wait of at least three hours. At length an officer and a civilian (the local mayor, probably), came with pencils and papers. It was now late at night, we had had no food since breakfast and were dead tired. Some had been able to buy food and drink. But those of us who had brought no money were feeling the effects of our fast.

A number of citizens now appeared in the gateway, and we soon discovered that they had come to offer shelter to those who could not be accommodated at the barracks. A young fellow of about my own age walked up to me and asked me if I would care to spend the night at his home. I didn't like to refuse as he seemed quite eager to be hospitable, although I would have preferred sleeping in the depot on some straw in order to inure myself betimes to what lay ahead. However, we went out of the gate together, and there his sister was waiting for us. Their house was not far away and on arriving at it I discovered that they were the children of a fairly wealthy cotton-spinner. The daughter was about two years older than her brother and a very charming girl. She was extremely pretty, with perfect teeth and a musical laugh. Her hair was arranged in coils round her ears and enhanced her looks.

I was ashamed, as I had not had a wash since early morning, and had got very dirty in the train. However, I was able to have a bath and made myself fairly presentable. Luckily I had brought a couple of spare shirts and some collars. My host was very surprised when I told him my name and my father's business. He asked me why I hadn't waited and joined one of the special regiments that would shortly be raised for educated men. I said I hadn't considered the matter, but that now I was in a rough crowd I would stick it, as I did not think the war would last more than two or three months. My host replied :

"Would to God you were right, lad, but we shall be lucky if it's over in three years. It's going to be a long job, and many of us won't see the end of it. Crowns will go

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toppling down and Europe may not survive if it lasts long enough. Speaking as a business man, I see economic exhaustion for Europe unless a speedy victory comes to one side or the other, and that is not likely, the contestants being too well matched."

Here was a hard-headed business man talking about the war lasting three years, and for the first time since my enlistment I began to have a vague suspicion that it was going to be a bigger, a bloodier, and a far more desperate affair than those people realized who chalked "To Berlin" on the trains and said it would be over before Christmas. We retired early, and as soon as I had finished my breakfast I prepared to leave.

"Before I go just tell me why you picked me out from the mob; was it because I looked more forlorn than the others?" I asked the son of my host with a smile.

"It was because you had on a fairly clean collar and seemed less uncouth than the others," he replied, "and if I had brought home a tramp he would have felt uncomfortable and so would we."

When I returned to the tramway depot after promising my hosts that I would let them know how fortune treated me, I found most of my companions there. They were sitting about smoking and spitting on the ground in front of them.

I waited for an hour and then an order came that we were to go to the barracks. We formed fours, a ragged, untidy phalanx who kept on inquiring in discordant and plaintive voices whether they were downhearted, and answering with a terrific "NO!"

At length we reached the barracks and were sent to the square to help erect a huge marquee. This was a difficult job, as no one knew very much about it and a fresh breeze was blowing. One of the greater gods (who I found was a Company Sergeant-Major) was racing about wanting to know why the hell he had been unfortunate enough to discover such a lot of born fools, and what would happen to the British Empire if I and my colleagues were called upon to save it before the C.S.M. had knocked some bloody sense into us.

Finally he was able to communicate some semblance of

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concerted action to his myrmidons, and after terrific labour (much of which was dissipated owing to the appalling stupidity of the soldiers in embryo), the marquee was more or less erect. The C.S.M.'s cursing was superb. It had polish, force, sting; it was concise, pungent and bore the hall-mark of the perfect artist.

We were told that since the barracks were full we were to sleep under canvas. Unfortunately no bedding was available and that meant lying on the bare floor.

When the men found they were to sleep on the bare earth there was a tremendous outcry and a deputation was appointed to interview the Commanding Officer. The ex-soldiers quoted various army regulations about airing a grievance in the proper manner, and one produced a tattered copy of Field-Service Regulations which appeared to contain the welcome information that a soldier need never feel aggrieved. He had an unlimited right of appeal and could even carry his case to the General Officer Commanding-in-Chief.

After half an hour or so our deputation returned and informed the anxious throng that the old bastard, meaning evidently the C.O., tried to put the wind up them by threatening he would have them put in clink (which appeared to mean prison), and severely punished for insubordination.

One of the deputation, a thin Cockney, facetiously inclined, climbed on to a box and said:

"Listen, mites, an' I'll tell yer wot 'appened. The b— stuck 'is winder in 'is eye" (and the speaker stuck the shining lid of a small tin into his left eye like a monocle), "an' roared at us that we wos in a war not a bleedin' picnic.

"Then 'e said:

"'Get ter 'ell out of it an' learn ter be pukka soldiers, not ol' wimen squealin' 'cause yer fevver beds ain't arrived.'

"Then I sed:

"'Beggin' yer pardon, sir, we don't want no fevver beds but we don't want to sleep on the bare erf before we gits ter the front.'

"'Ow long 'ave you been in the army, my boy?' ses 'e.

"'I've done me twenty-one in the Cherry Pickers an' pensioned orf wiv exemplary on me character.'



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"So 'e told me I ought ter know better than comin' wiv a trivial complaint. Any'ow 'e sed 'e'd send a sergeant ter see wot 'e could do. An' yer wouldn't 'ave 'ad nollink if Bill Adams 'adn't gorn an' put yer grouse proper like."

So Bill Adams, who, it appeared, had really served twenty-one years in some regiment or other, descended from his perch, beaming with satisfaction at having impressed his companions. Some of his friends shouted: "Come an' 'ave a drink, Bill," and they disappeared in the direction of the canteen, where most of the men who had any money spent their spare time drinking, playing cards, and roistering. The scene was like that depicted by Rubens in his "Kermess." Freed from nagging wives, stern employers and the necessity of working like galley-slaves to maintain a numerous progeny under wretched conditions, many of these men regarded enlistment as opening the doors of paradise. They were making hay while the sun shone, and as long as money could be obtained, their motto would be:

"Eat, drink and be merry, for to-morrow we die."

The pangs of hunger making themselves felt induced the mob to go in search of the cook-house. We were issued with a tin plate, mug and spoon, and were informed that we would have to pay for these articles if we lost them.

I fell into line at 11.30 a.m. and waited until 2 p.m. Those who had any money drifted into the town or to the canteen. It looked as if my resolution to live on army rations was going to make me pull in my belt.

Chaos reigned everywhere. All available accommodation was overtaxed, and during those first days I saw the ghastly muddle that ensues when a country calls for hundreds of thousands of men without making adequate preparations to receive them. At 2.15 p.m. a corporal appeared and told us we would be served in the marquee. Thither we went and sat down at long tables. After a further wait cooks came carrying large boilers in which were potatoes boiled in their jackets.

"Look out for spuds," called a cook, and they began throwing them along the tables which were soon liberally coated with grease. Each man grabbed two or three and

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dipped them in piles of salt scattered about the tables. The next course consisted of big chunks of half-raw meat which also came sliding along the greasy planks. We resembled nothing so much as a troop of hungry lions being fed by keepers in the Zoo. Fortunately my teeth were sound and I was able to tear my chunk to pieces. Some of my neighbours were less lucky. At least two broke their false teeth.

Later in the day we were given numbered discs, so that at meal times we would line up in proper order, and no man would be able to "come the old soldier." I have discovered that this phrase means to be guilty of any kind of sharp practice. In the sense I use it here it means coming twice for the same meal. I stood in a line two hours for tea, and when I got it saw that the boilers had not been cleaned since dinner, for bits of potato skins floated on the tea. I was depressed at the coarseness and barbarity of my environment.

I felt vaguely that it was another side of life I was exploring, that there was any amount of human interest among these rough fellows, and that it was better to rub shoulders with slum dwellers and poachers than to develop the suburban mentality with its pious prudes and holy hypocrites.

I went for a walk into the town and saw the mill workers returning home, their heavy clogs clattering on the pavements. Never had restaurants or cinemas seemed so attractive. I examined the contents of shop windows, watched prostitutes in tattered finery ogling soldiers, and at length found the public library, where I spent a couple of happy hours.

At ten o'clock I returned to barracks. When I reached the marquee I saw some straw and some large sacks called palliasses lying in the centre. A few men were sleeping or lying smoking in small groups. I filled a sack and dragged it to the side. A man who had a blanket said to me in a hoarse whisper :

"Go quick, mate, the quarter-bloke is dishing out blankets at the stores. There ain't enough for all, so some will 'ave to go without."

I ran to the stores which had a big label over the door,

and found the room nearly full of men also seeking blankets. The soldier who was giving them out had his cap placed on the floor in a prominent place and it contained money. Those who contributed received a new blanket, those who did not were given old, torn, and dirty ones from a heap at the side. One or two powerful men who looked like old soldiers cursed the quarter-bloke's hireling and took a new blanket without giving any money, but the others hadn't the boldness to follow suit. When my turn came, as it was obvious that I was not going to contribute, the store-man handed me a dirty blanket. It stank abominably and I threw it on the floor, picked up a new one and walked out. I was astounded at my temerity but it succeeded.

Arriving back at the marquee, I took off my hat and shoes, spread out my blanket, got under it, and surveyed my surroundings. The straw was sharp and rough, so I flattened it down with a stone. After a while I made a pillow of my shoes and jacket. Some had bolstered up the end of their palliasses by putting bricks or stones under the end, but I was too tired to search for such things.

I fell asleep at about midnight and was rudely awakened soon afterwards by a drunken man falling over my bed. He wanted to fight me, but my neighbour, who looked a burly navvy, told him to clear off or he would break his bloody dial. The drunken one muttered and staggered away. A few men who had been unable to get blankets were lying on the table.

I slept very little that night. Two big rascals who had been drinking started quarrelling at one in the morning and resolved to fight it out. The cause was, as usual, puerile. One of them had served in the 17th Lancers, the other in the Irish Guards. Each said his regiment was supreme and that of his opponent worthless.

They stripped to the waist and fought in the middle of the available floor space. The lighter man danced round his bigger opponent and struck him several times. But there was a wicked gleam in the other's eye and he simply waited until he saw a chance. Then he suddenly struck the lighter man such a crushing blow in the face that I thought he had killed him. Two or three of us jumped up and lifted

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the prostrate man. I wiped the blood from his face and saw that his nose was broken. He was very pale, but as soon as he recovered his senses wanted to continue the fight. We tried to stop him, but it was useless and the second round began. The lighter one, who weighed about twelve stone, seemed to have been sobered by the blow and now made his opponent cut a sorry figure. He hit him where and when he liked, and was so quick on his feet that the heavier man hadn't a chance.

The big fellow started to grunt and wipe the blood from his face. One eye was closed and his mouth badly cut. After some desultory sparring, Broken-nose jumped in like a flash, dealt Fat-eye a murderous upper-cut on the point of the jaw and toppled him over like an uprooted oak. The strength behind that blow and the timing were such that it would have felled an ox, I'm certain. I've found out since that Broken-nose was once middle-weight champion of his regiment, in Egypt I believe.

Two days later I heard rumours that drafts were being prepared for unknown destinations. As I was walking across the square to look at the notice-board, I was hailed by a voice, and looking round saw a corporal. He yelled out :

"Come on, you, I want you for sanitary fatigues."

I did not know precisely what he meant, but went with him and he gradually collected a dozen men. We procured spades and proceeded to the communal latrine. This was a trench about twenty feet long and a couple wide. A pole had been fixed horizontally along one side of the hole and high enough for men to sit on. Some sacking flapped on poles round the hole and screened it somewhat from the public gaze. A number of clients sat on the pole and exchanged badinage.

While we stood at ease with our spades the corporal went inside and ordered the occupants to hurry, so that we could fill in the trench. This was the signal for a rush to use the convenience, because when it was filled in no man could let nature assert her rights until the new latrine was dug and screened. The hurrying men crowded inside, squeezed on to the pole and soon were as thick as swallows on a tele-

phone wire. Without the slightest warning a sharp crack rang out, and the pole snapped in the middle. Then followed pandemonium. Five men were completely in the trench, several were partly in and the lucky few who had been able to jump away laughed and jeered at the luckless wights struggling to free themselves from their awful predicament. The unfortunates had to run the gauntlet in front of the whole crowd who railed and vociferated to their hearts' content.

I learnt gradually that after hard physical toil there came a feeling of well-being that made one sleep soundly. I discovered too that my companions included a percentage of shirkers. Some of them were bone lazy, owing perhaps to the fact that they had been forced to toil hard from an early age for a miserable pittance, living in wretched slums and almost crushed in the struggle for life. One could hardly blame them for dodging work when circumstances made it possible. It was their natural enemy. I began to understand a picture in a book at home. It shows a notice announcing a sale of work. A tramp, slouching by, looks amazed and says: "Hell, fancy buying it!"

Whenever I was on fatigues with other men a few artful dodgers managed to do practically nothing. They had a flair for the easiest jobs and stopped as soon as the N.C.O. turned his back. Every job was bungled with cheerful indifference.

As soon as I was dismissed from my excruciating fatigues I went to the sergeant-major and asked him if it were true that drafts were being sent away. He looked at me quizzically and replied that two drafts were being prepared, one for Salisbury Plain and the other for Lansdowne on the south coast. I asked him which place, if any, I was down for. Without the slightest hesitation he said it was the Plain, although how he knew that when he was ignorant of my very name will for ever be a mystery.

I walked away wondering how I was going to remain in any degree respectable, for I was still without money and averse to writing home for any. Months later my father told me that he sent me two registered letters during my stay in Pressing. Neither reached me. This is not sur-

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prising when one remembers the utter confusion that prevailed.

We duly fell in at eight o'clock and were paid seven shillings each, or to be more precise those who were cute went to the office and obtained their first week's pay on declaring that they were destitute and needed the money for urgent purposes.

While marching to the station some men dropped out and ran into pubs from which they emerged with big bottles of beer known as flagons. A few, more opulent, bought whisky. The train was again packed with troops and the platform crowded with civilians, who were cheering the brave defenders of England, home and glory. Some pretty and well-dressed wenches were handing out tea and buns. I felt so disgusted at the manners and language of my companions that I did not lean out for refreshments, although I was thirsty and ravenous. Catcalls were exchanged between the open windows, and some of the half-drunk defenders of civilization vociferated such salacious remarks that their companions tried to pull them from the windows.

At length we started. The journey was extremely slow and we did not reach London until six next morning. Again I sought a perch on the rack, but it was too uncomfortable and soon I climbed down. One of the men in my carriage had two bottles of whisky and insisted on everyone drinking his health. I politely refused and this made him furious. He was going to knock my head off and disfigure me in various diabolical ways. His other companions urged me to have a drink as the donor was what they called fighting-drunk and would make a mess of the compartment if provoked. I decided it wasn't worth while sticking to my teetotal principles at the expense of a riot and bloodshed, so took a drink from the bottle. That was the first time I had ever tasted whisky, although I had occasionally drunk light wines in France.

Many were only happy when roistering in pubs, drinking with harlots, gambling, cursing, fighting and brawling; and yet when I got to know them I loved them as much as Falstaff, Pistol, Bardolph and their companions. We all became sworn brothers in France, and before the majority

went to Abraham's bosom they gave proof of courage and fortitude of such a high order that one could only marvel. After all, their jokes and tales were no worse than one finds in Chaucer, Boccaccio, Marguerite de Navarre and many others whose writings have become classics.

I was thoroughly glad when we reached Lanshore and marched to the barracks. The military buildings there are large and up-to-date. We were paraded in front of the barracks and divided up into companies. My first abode was a large room in the main building, but it was rumoured that we were to be moved to the married quarters as soon as the women and children could be shifted. Soon after our arrival we were given some kit. No khaki uniforms were available, but a few of us were given blue serge suits and forage caps of the same colour. We looked more like convicts than soldiers and hated being seen in the street in such attire. I saw a good deal that looked suspiciously like incompetence and criminal carelessness in the powers that were shaping my destiny, but perhaps I took a jaundiced view owing to the discomfort I had to put up with.



## CHAPTER V

THE day after my arrival at Lanshore I had my first fight in the army. It was a sanguinary affair, but presumably won the respect of any who were inclined to bully, for they left me alone after the mill and some tried to be friendly in a rough way. My fight had its origin in an incident which happened while we were doing marching-drill on the square. A fellow behind me started kicking my heels, making it almost impossible for me to march properly. He was an uncouth-looking lout, with square shoulders and big fists. I stood it for a little while, thinking that it was merely a joke and would soon cease. However, it became worse and was most exasperating. When I could stand it no longer I turned and told my tormentor to stop his nonsense. He and his cronies beamed with delight, and, punching me in the back, the ruffian hissed :

"If I 'ave any of yer ol buck I'll bash yer mug so that yer bloody mother won't know yer. An', by Christ, if yer looking' for trouble yer'll damn soon get it."

"I'm not looking for trouble," said I, "but I'm putting up with no bullying from you, and for the way you spoke of my mother I'll fight you as long as I can stand."

My challenge was accepted with alacrity and I was informed that the matter would be settled after the parade. The corporal drilling us stood a long way off and heard nothing. Many of the men were extremely stupid and took days to learn their right foot from their left. The simplest command tied them up in knots, and their antics brought forth a volley of profanity from the sorely tried instructor, who was not averse to showing the powers of his vocabulary and the fertility of his imagination in inventing new curses. Those who have done problems connected with permutations and combinations know what can be done with a dozen words.



At the end of the parade I found myself surrounded by a few men who appeared to have appointed themselves my seconds. We went to a piece of waste ground behind the married quarters which was apparently the spot where fights were settled.

On the way I turned things over in my mind. At school I had earned something of a reputation as a boxer and had a certain amount of confidence. My opponent was about four inches shorter than I, but much more stockily built, so that our weights were about equal. He was obviously in no condition for a fight whereas I was in good trim. For years I had been in the habit of skipping every day and was always fit. Whatever the issue might be I was determined to give a good account of myself, so as to free myself for good from the attentions of the bullies. A time-keeper was appointed and he inquired whether the rounds were to be of two minutes' duration or three. I said three, my opponent two. We tossed for it and I won. This I regarded as a good omen. All the men present seemed to enjoy hugely the prospect of a mill, and several came and gave me advice concerning tactics. It was clear that apart from his little clique my antagonist was not liked.

We were admonished to get ready, pulled off our jackets and rolled up our sleeves. When the referee called "Time" I held out my hand for the usual shake, but my opponent ignored it and aimed a terrific swing at my head. I quickly withdrew it a few inches and felt the rush of air as his knuckles swept past my face. This increased my confidence and I kept very cool. Another factor in my favour was that being left-handed I puzzled my man with my unorthodox stance. Feinting with my right I delivered an uppercut with my left, caught my adversary under the jaw, lifted him off his feet and put him flat on his back. Luckily for him the end of the round was announced (by beating a tin with a poker), and he was brought back to life by his anxious friends.

Before the fight started the betting had been 10 to 1 on my opponent, with few takers. It now suddenly veered round and was 2 to 1 on me. The second round was uneventful. We were both cautious and my opponent,

feeling a wholesome respect for my left, kept covering up and blocking my attempts to land a good blow. He was clever and I could see he was no novice. His ears and nose bore evidence of past scraps. He brought me to my knees with a hefty blow to the midriff, but I evened matters by sending him reeling with a hard swing to his ear. He clinched and tried to pin my arms, butting me in the face with the top of his head as we reeled round the improvised ring. With a series of fierce jabs I forced his head away and saw with satisfaction that his face was covered with blood. The end of the round brought him much-needed relief, for he was panting ominously and on the verge of collapse. Some of his backers began to fear they were going to lose their money and asked him if he was going to be beaten by a greenhorn.

"Serve you right for 'aving too much bloody booze last night," roared one of his disappointed supporters.

The fight dragged on without either of us securing a decided advantage. In the fourth round I was lucky enough to catch my grunting enemy a wicked blow on the mouth which split his lip badly and caused him to spit out his false teeth in fragments, he having forgotten to take them out before the fight. In the fifth session he caught me a pile-driver which I judged to be below the belt, and which would have put me away for good had I not been moving backwards as it came and was able to steel the abdominal muscles somewhat. I went down on my knees and grunted with pain as I strove to regain my breath. My opponent was so wild with rage and pain that he rushed in to finish me off, striking my head while the referee was counting me out. The gong came to my assistance at the count of eight. One man sponged my face, another fanned with a towel, and a third poured water from a bottle over my head. Then he made me gargle and sponged my face. One of my seconds whispered:

"You've got the b—— beat, but be careful; 'e'es up to all the tricks of the trade, an' the referee's a pal of 'is. Take no bloody chances."

The seventh round saw us both the worse for wear, but the man before me was staggering like a drunken man. He

tried hard to make the fighting close, but, in spite of his taunts, I kept a clear head and jolted back his head with a straight left that was now never out of his face. When I threw defence to the winds and swapped punches toe to toe he got in some nasty swings that did me no good. He was too good a bruiser for me and I soon realized my only hope lay in using my superior reach. As the eighth round was drawing to a close he came at me like a mad bull. He swung his right and I moved my head slightly to avoid the blow, stepped forward quickly and caught him the hardest punch I've ever delivered. His forward impetus increased the force of the impact, his knees wobbled, his eyes bulged and down he went like a sack of corn. Great was the applause when the bully failed to rise at the count of ten. The knock-out was on the point of the jaw and the receiver took some time to come round.

A number of men came forward, shook my hand and bore me off in triumph to my room. I was by no means unscathed. A number of hefty blows had left their marks on my face, although it didn't swell much as I carried no superfluous fat. When we reached the room the corporal asked what was the matter. My escort told him and he fairly danced with joy.

"Damned good," he cried. "It's about time that blighter was licked; he's been throwing his weight about far too much since he came here."

Then Corporal Williams, a little reservist, took charge. He sent to the cook for some fresh meat, and while awaiting its arrival wiped the blood from my face and bathed my cuts with a liquid that smarted horribly on the raw. The meat was placed on the damaged parts so that only my nose was uncovered, and bound on with strips of rag. I was ordered to get to bed and not move before the morrow, an order I was only too glad to obey. It was difficult to breathe as the blood congealed in my nose and my head ached. However, I passed a fairly good night and in the morning examined my face in the glass. It was plain that I had been in a fight, but there were no swellings, not even a black eye. There was a fairly extensive bruise on the right temple, but that was nothing. My opponent was unable to leave

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barracks for a week and his face was torn to ribbons. He had spent the evening in the canteen, did nothing to patch up his wounds, and for several days his eyes remained swollen and discoloured. That was by no means my last fight in the army, but it was a trying ordeal.

We were rapidly licked into shape by a variety of drills. Rifle, physical, platoon, company, signalling and other drills kept us busy, weeded out the weaklings and straightened up the fit. We learnt how to move smartly and in unison, endure hardship and rough it without whining. The boozers had a hard time, but the hard routine sweated the beer out of them and they enjoyed their swigs more after a gruelling time on the drill-ground or after a long route march. The first few days on the square were most amusing. A big corporal drilled us most of the time, but others took a hand from time to time. Before we received the convict suits most of us drilled in civilian clothes. I've never in all my life seen a more bizarre collection of men. A large proportion were ragged and down at heel. Perhaps they had left their best at home. Some were so badly shod that a toe would protrude or a heel would be visible. We marched so much that shoddy footwear came to pieces, unable to stand the strain. The sun was often hot during those August days, and the sweat rolled down our faces as we marched to and fro at a sharp pace over the dusty ground.

One day I was marching behind four men who presented such a grotesque picture that one had to laugh. The one on the left wore an ancient bowler hat, several sizes too small; the fellow second from the left had on a straw hat of which the top opened at the back like an open sardine-tin and a mass of scrubby hair was visible through the aperture. His neighbour to the right sported a military cap much too big. It rested on his ears. The loon on the extreme right boasted a top-hat badly dented and a frock-coat that had seen better days. His trousers were made for a giant and flapped round the legs of their latest owner like sails on a mast. The men called them concertina pants.

I was informed by my companions that the top-hatted one was one of the unfortunates who fell into the latrine at Pressing, and having been forced to discard his raiment had

fished his fantastic attire out of some odd corner. He was short, thick in the body with thin legs. His frock-coat had been made for a slender man and was like a strait-jacket on the poor devil. Although his trousers were rolled up at the bottoms they still sagged in a piteous manner. As we trudged and doubled, sweated and cursed, tripped and ran on, the sight of those oddly dressed figures was too comical for words. There were fat men, thin men, tall men, short men, grave men, gay men. It was enough to make the angels laugh. One fellow had the seat of his trousers fastened with pins. When we were doing physical jerks and came to the double-knee bend, this chap's temporary fastenings gave way and his shirt fluttered through the orifice. He did not seem to be aware of the mishap or pretended he wasn't. But when we resumed marching he was unlucky enough to get out of step and this drew the wrath of the corporal on him. The irate N.C.O. kept shouting "lep-ri, lep-ri," but Torn-pants took no notice :

"Ah, you with the see-more trousers, get into step."

Such incidents happened daily, and gradually I lost all revulsion to the foulest language; it became the norm.

Soon after our arrival in barracks a rumour spread that we were to leave at the end of the month. It persisted for some days and then died away. Although most rumours ended that way we believed them for a while. We were restless and eager for change and adventure.

After some days I had to break my resolution not to send for money, and drew £10 from my account, redeeming my watch and sending it home as there were a number of cases of petty theft. One man caught stealing from a comrade was drummed out with ignominy. The battalion was assembled round the square and the wretched man marched to the centre. He looked pale and seemed to feel the disgrace keenly. After the sentence had been read out, his badges and buttons were cut off, and he was marched to the guard-room near the main gate escorted by an armed guard. Whether he was turned out into the street in khaki or given civilian clothes I don't know. To all but the most depraved such public degradation must sting like a lash.

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With my money I was able to purchase a complete suit of khaki of rather smart cut. Some of the regulars had two or even three suits, and when hard up were willing to flog one for a consideration. I paid £1 for a new suit when the owner had lost every sou at cards and had to have a drink or die. The tunic had what was known as a "square-pushing" collar, which was stiff and considered much smarter than the regulation pattern.

My new attire was smart enough to allow me to sally forth in the evenings and even venture as far as Brighton. When I wore the convict suit I was ashamed to go out into town, and either stayed in barracks or took a walk into the country. Pride, I suppose. Then I received a military greatcoat and a cap, so that I was able to walk out with the blue hidden under the khaki, and thus attired I went to spend the evening with some people in Brighton who knew my parents. When they urged me to take off my coat I refused on the pretext that I was cold. Then the heat in the sitting-room became unbearable, and I had to pull off my thick coat, revealing my blue jacket and trousers with khaki puttees from the knees down. This seemed to me a very great humiliation. However, they were quite nice about it and the evening passed more or less agreeably, but they were such narrow-minded straight-laced folk that I made up my mind never to go there again, and when another invitation came replied that I was on duty.

On the following morning I was on guard at the main gate from four till six. Soon after five o'clock a woman came towards me from the direction of the cooks' quarters and asked me if I would let her out. She was small and rather pretty, smartly dressed, with a veil and a hand-bag. Her appearance was that of a cultured woman and she spoke with a refined voice.

I replied that I was unable to let anyone pass without permission from the sergeant of the guard, whom I called forthwith.

"You cheeky young whipper-snapper, if you don't let me out at once I'll report you to the commanding officer who is a friend of mine."

"Madam, you can do what you jolly well like, but

you will not get that gate open until the N.C.O. gives his consent."

The sergeant now arrived and a whispered conversation ensued. After a few minutes he allowed me to open the gate and let her out. "You wouldn't think that little bitch is one of the worst whores" (he pronounced the word "hoors") "in Brighton."

I obtained permission to absent myself from barracks for the week-end. The South Downs were glorious and on route marches I had seen enough to make me want to see more. Leaving barracks at midday on Saturday, I walked about fifteen miles before tea, which I had in an old-fashioned cottage in Wilmington. There was such a peaceful atmosphere about the place that I felt I would like to stay there for ever. The tea was like nectar with home-made jam and scones. An old lady with the sweetest expression served me and told me she had two sons in the army. She was a widow and had apparently seen much suffering. Her husband had died when the boys were very young, but she had struggled hard to give them as good an education as possible. The elder son was twenty-one and had just become a teacher. The younger one had won a scholarship to the Imperial College of Science and would have completed his course in another year, had he not gone to the army.

"They both enlisted the day after the war broke out," she added, "and the worry will kill me."

"Cheer up, mother, the war will be over by Christmas and then your boys will come back," said I, trying to look cheerful while I lied with gusto in order to comfort her.

She was frail and timid, her face lined and hair white. There was something inexpressibly pathetic about her and I did my best to comfort her. She showed me photographs of her boys in the uniform of the Black Watch. They were fine fellows, with sincerity written in their faces and eyes that looked straight at you.

After tea I tramped on and spent the night at Lewes. Mine host was fat, red of face and garrulous. He appeared to be afflicted with elephantiasis of the guts. His small pig-like eyes were almost hidden in fat, and he told me his views on religion, politics and social problems.

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"First of all we must blot out the bloody Germans, every b—— of em. Then we'll settle them goddam Yanks an' show 'em who rules the waves. Then we'll make the country 'appy an' contented so that a man will be able to afford 'is glass o' ale when 'e wants it."

His whole appearance denoted crass vulgarity, ignorance, conceit and meanness of soul. I would cheerfully have drowned him in a vat of beer.

His wife was a dainty little woman and fully aware of her physical attractions. After dinner the husband departed to spend the Sunday in his club in London, leaving his wife and me alone in the lounge.

"How would you like to be married to a selfish brute like that?" I was asked.

We were drinking port and I felt slightly fuddled, as I rarely touched anything stronger than tea.

"If you want my opinion it is that I wouldn't touch him with a barge pole and cannot understand how you could bring yourself to marry such a monstrosity," I blurted, emboldened by my libations.

"I was poor, working fourteen hours a day in London to keep myself, two young sisters and a delicate mother. He offered me wealth and ease with vastly improved circumstances for those whom I loved. It was the chance of a lifetime and I seized it with both hands. He soon tired of me and started spending his week-ends with *lorettes* in town. We have been sleeping apart for over a year, ever since he tried to get me to divorce him and I refused. He knocked me about in a fit of temper, but a friend of mine, an army captain, came and gave him such a flogging that he was in bed for a week. So now he realizes I am not entirely alone, he is polite to me in public, and ignores me completely in private. He tried to install one of his mistresses here but my friend returned, drove her out, gave him another flogging, and told him he would blow his brains out if tried on any more of his tricks. As he is an arrant coward he refrains. He sometimes employs a private detective to watch me so that if I should stray from the narrow path he would secure his divorce."

At that moment a furtive-looking individual entered and



called for a whisky and soda. The hostess winked to me and I realized that the new-comer was the sleuth-hound. When he went round to the back, Esther (for so I found was my friend's name) told me that he usually watched under her window, and sometimes, she suspected, he procured a ladder and peeped in. So I suggested she should go to bed and leave the rest to me. When he returned she pleaded a migraine and retired, leaving the servants to lock up. Only one other person slept inside the house, an old housekeeper devoted to Esther's interests. When the mistress had gone the spy turned to me and said with a leer :

"Smart bit of goods, eh ? "

"You're right," I acquiesced.

"Now look here, I'll make you an offer. She's nothing but a pros., and if you will leave the door or window open to-night I'll give you £50 cash."

"Give me the money first," I parried, "and I'm your man."

He pulled out a cheque-book and wrote out a cheque which I promptly tore up and threw in the grate as soon as it was in my hands.

"What's the game ? " he queried.

"Hand over the money in cash with a signed statement that it is a voluntary gift and I act, not before."

"But I don't carry all that money about in cash," he protested.

"That's your business, not mine," I retorted as I turned to my newspaper.

"Very well, wait until I come back," and he went off in search of the money. On his return he handed over the money in gold (after I had refused notes) and a statement that the money was a voluntary gift.

"Now at midnight bring a ladder under the window and you will have all the evidence you want."

He went off, well satisfied with his bargain, and I went up to confer with Esther. My plan was to get two or three soldiers and a car, throw the spy into the vehicle and send him for a long ride.

It was easy to find a car for hire, and no questions were

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asked when I agreed to pay £2 per hour. Driving to Lanshore, which was about ten miles away, I secured three trusty pals ready for any adventure. At midnight we were in hiding near the wall in the yard under Esther's window.

Steps came nearer and the sleuth hove in sight carrying a ladder. While he was placing it in position we pounced on him from behind, tied him up and put a sack over his head. Then my pals drove him to a spot about ten miles from the nearest cottage, flogged him until he yelled for mercy, and released him on condition he swore never again to molest Esther. The residue of the money was devoted to buying beer for the troops and enabled the whole of my company to have a glorious carousal. When I went to my room Esther came and I told her what had transpired. She said :

"I do hope they won't hurt the poor man."

"I hope they break the skunk's neck for spying on people," was my reply.

On the Sunday I walked to Steyning and lunched there. After looking round the place I walked to Arundel, where I had tea. My walk was a circuitous one, for I passed through Storrington, which fascinated me because of its beauty, its flowers, and its association with Francis Thompson.

O, there were flowers in Storrington,  
On the turf and on the spray.

After leaving Arundel I sauntered to Littlehampton and took the train to Lanshore.

The following evening I played banker and pontoon. Those were the games we played most, although some of the men preferred Crown and Anchor. We played in the middle of the room with a blanket over the table. When "Lights-Out" sounded we put blankets over the windows and along the bottom of the door. Gambling is like a fever. I made up my mind to stop at midnight, but was still playing when the bugle sounded in the morning. I staked a shilling usually and found that I had lost fifteen and a night's sleep. In another room they were playing a game called "house." Numbers were fished out of a bag by a man running the show, and the first man to complete his set,

that is to have every number in place on his card, was the winner. I did not play that game much for, like "Crown and Anchor," the odds were overwhelmingly in favour of the man running the game. At intervals through the night one heard "Legs Eleven," "Kelly's Eye," "Clickety-Click," "Top of the House," and so on. These words puzzled me at first, but I soon discovered that they stand for numbers. For example, "Clickety-Click" stands for sixty-six.

A couple of days later I went over to Preston Park Barracks, Brighton, to see a friend who had enlisted in the Field Artillery. He was a youth of about my own age, who had also left school in July. He was lying on his bed, too stiff to move as a result of a couple of hours in the riding-school. They had to learn to ride remounts that were only half broken in and had many tumbles.

Many of the horses had no idea of jumping and had to be flogged over the fence. Often they would gallop up to the obstacle, then pull up short, throwing the scared tyros flying over their heads.

They spent a lot of time drilling on 18-pounder guns and grooming horses. The men claimed that since a horse cost £40 and a man one shilling, the beasts were treated with far more consideration than the men.

Some of them pitied me because I was a poor foot-slogger, and they were rather proud of their spurs and bandoliers. They also thought they had a better chance in battle, being farther from the enemy. However, one soon learnt to discount the grumbles, for the *groggnards* were often the best soldiers when in a scrap.

The following morning I was getting ready for parade when someone told me my cap was in the urine-tub, a large iron receptacle placed at night near the door and removed in the morning. I found my cap had been in the urine all night and at once suspected a lout named Jones. He hated me for some unknown reason and showed his spite in the meanest of ways. He was really the only rotter in the room capable of doing such a thing, for, rough as the others were, I had their respect. I knew Jones had come in very late the night before, helplessly drunk. When in that state he

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was worse than a beast. He was trying to "work his ticket," i.e. secure his discharge, and had tried a variety of dodges with that object in view. I strode over to Jones's bed trembling with anger.

"Did you throw my cap in the tub?"

"Yes, an' I'll bloody well put you there if you don't b—— off."

"Get up and do it, you miserable cur."

He blinked out of his little piggish eyes and swore by all his gods he would make mincemeat of me. The fight was most fierce but did not last long. He was in the worst possible condition and tried to throw me with a wrestling grip, after which he secured a stranglehold that nearly finished me. He was utterly unscrupulous and I had to jab him with my knee to avoid strangulation. He was dead game and withstood any amount of punishment. We fought, wrestled, and scrapped like Kilkenny cats. At the end of the mill he went to hospital with a broken jaw and I never saw him again. I was placed under arrest for,

(1) Fighting.

(2) Damaging property.

A corporal and one or two men gave evidence. The C.O. held that Jones was the aggressor. In addition he had a black record and was wanted by the police. I was admonished, and the C.O. warned me not to take the law into my own hands. However, the tone in which he spoke took the sting out of the reproof.

Next day we were inoculated. While we stood in a long line with one arm bare, an R.A.M.C. man came along and dabbed some iodine on the upper part of each exposed arm. Then the doctor passed along injecting the serum. The operation is not really painful but the after-effects are rather unpleasant. The arm swells and one has an attack of fever. The R.A.M.C. fellow (known as a poultice walloper) ran out of iodine before he reached the end of the line, so spat on his rag and cleaned the place for the needle.

While out on a march we spotted an orchard and decided to raid it at the first opportunity. The trees were heavily laden and the fruit looked good. One night when it was very dark a dozen of us blacked our faces with boot polish,

took our kit-bags and made our way to the orchard. It was surrounded by a barbed-wire fence, through which we crept after posting a sentry at each corner of the enclosure. In a short time we had filled our bags and were leaving the trees, laughing and joking at the success of our raid, when we heard the whistle—the alarm signal—so we decamped. I tried to get through the wire quickly and tore my trousers badly on the barbs. On reaching the road we found Withers, a young Dorset farm labourer, struggling with a policeman. We rescued our companion and held the bobby while offering him the choice between holding his peace and having a ducking.

"I'm going to arrest the whole lot of you."

"Chuck 'im in the pond," urged one of the men; "'e's the b—— that runs in the chaps coming 'ome from town after 'avin' a few drinks."

This particular arm of the law was most unpopular on account of his habit of arresting soldiers for trifling offences, and several of the raiders had old scores to pay off. I admired the policeman's pluck for refusing to compromise, but was determined not to let him get the better of us. After some discussion we removed his boots, carried him to a near-by pond, and were ready to throw him in when I suggested that it would be a pity to spoil his uniform, also that he couldn't chase us while naked, so we stripped him and tied his clothing in a neat bundle at the foot of a tree. Then the naked man was pitched into the middle of the dam and we ran for home as fast as our legs could carry us. We reached the barracks without further incident and had a glorious feed.

Next day there was an identification parade, and the policeman, looking grim as death, came along the long lines of men looking for his assailants. He was puzzled, but after much trouble was able to pick out a few men. Each of them was able to prove an alibi, and the man in blue had to retire discomfited. I felt sorry for the poor devil, who was only doing his duty, but I regarded the whole affair as a most enjoyable escapade.

On the following evening I went to Brighton and walked along the front. While I was sitting on a seat looking at

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the sea a girl came along and sat near me. I asked her if the distant noise was thunder or guns. She looked at me with a smile and murmured :

*" Je regrette, mais je ne comprends pas anglais, je suis Belge."*

I answered her in French and she seemed overjoyed to find someone who could speak that language. She said she was a refugee and had been separated from her family in the rush before the advancing Germans, but hoped to have news of them soon.

That was the first time I had ever spoken to a strange girl in the street, and a few weeks before I would never have dreamt of doing such a thing. Barrack life changed one in many ways. That will, I think, be obvious from my narrative. In a very short time I became much less diffident, squeamish and fastidious. That evening on the Brighton front I cast back in my mind and examined the changes that had taken place in me since my enlistment. I had learnt more about life than I ever knew before, and had become inured to a harder and more brutal mode of existence than I had envisaged before leaving home. In spite of the unpleasant features I did not regret in any way having joined a nondescript crowd. By drilling, marching, and living with members of the submerged tenth, I learnt the conditions under which they existed and their outlook. Their language was pretty awful, so were their manners, but they were hardly to blame for that. One man was a labourer in a steel-works and earned eighteen shillings a week, on which he had to keep a wife and four children. He slept next to me and often at night would tell me about his struggle to feed the hungry mouths.

" It's a b——, yer know, ter see 'em going 'ungry to school, an' shiverin' in winter when the wind blows from the east, cuttin' through their cheap clobber an' makes th' poor devils shiver. Then when th' old geezer is ill in bed an' the bloody blankets in pawn, 'ow'd yer like that, eh ? An' sometimes th' rent is be'ind or yer can't pay th' grocer an' the muckin' bum comes an' takes yer table an' chairs. We lost two kids because we couldn't feed 'em prop'ly. Then people wonder why we kick up a stink now an' agen."

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I joined th' bloody army ter 'av a rest an' proper grub, but as for patriotism, 'ow the 'ell can yer 'spect it?"

Jim was a good fellow in spite of his growls, and many months later in France was to prove over and over again his gratitude for little acts of kindness I had shown him. The fear of sickness and unemployment that had haunted him for years made him bitter, and he never tired of inveighing against employers, moneylenders, idle rich, and all who really or in his imagination oppressed the poor.

As I spoke to the Belgian girl I felt a thrill of pleasure, for she was pretty, elegant, and had a most charming manner. It was delightful to speak to someone without discussing grub, fatigues, parades, and the countless things that soldiers grouse about. We walked along the beach and reached a quiet spot where we sat on my coat. As I lit her cigarette Monique leaned over and the contact of her body thrilled me so that I trembled violently. It was like an electric shock passing through my body.

"*Avez-vous froid ?*"

"*Oui, le vent est frais.*"

I lied, for the evening was warm, but I could not control the trembling that shook my body. We were soon locked in a passionate embrace. I could feel the beating of her heart and the pressure of her breasts. She was dressed in black silk and it was impregnated with a subtle and provoking perfume. Since that evening I have had affairs with many women but never met one that could beat Monique at love-making; she was an artist. Her dexterity must have been the result of a long and delightful apprenticeship, but I in my ignorance believed her when she assured me she had never kissed a man before.

I was a veritable poltroon, consumed by desire yet afraid to take what was offered me. My sensations were curious. The first was fear of disease, the second horror of wronging an innocent girl and possibly bringing a child into the world to suffer for my sins. At length I compromised by swearing that I had to return for an important duty, but that I would be free the following evening. We arranged to meet at the seat on the front and separated after kissing each other. Her warm soft lips intoxicated me, her unre-

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strained passion swept over me like a flood; she was in truth a high priestess of voluptuousness.

On returning to barracks I called myself a thousand fools for not accepting the proffered fruit. I lay in bed smoking a cigarette and seeing Monique floating in the air before my eyes, no matter where I turned them. The sheen of her silks gleamed like a thousand tiny lamps hidden in velvet, and when I closed my eyes I still felt the pressure of her body, and the vaguely provocative perfume still excited my amorous propensities.

Next evening, to my chagrin, I was detailed for guard. Impossible to find a substitute, and failure to present myself would have meant clink, which I was anxious to avoid if possible. It was with a heavy heart that I paced up and down with a rifle on my shoulder. What would Monique think of me? She would surely imagine I had wantonly broken my word. I was without her address and might never find her again. There was a big streak of the romantic in my nature and if a girl looked at me twice I imagined I had made a conquest for life, that we would fly off to some far-away island of the blest, where we would spend the rest of our days billing and cooing under palms on the shore of a blue lagoon.

With infinite difficulty I managed to bribe a man to take my place for two hours while I hastened away to meet my siren. She was not at the trysting-place, although I waited there for two solid hours. I thought Monique must have been suddenly taken ill or knocked down by a taxi. Perhaps she had found her people or had had to go away suddenly in search of them. My despair was too great to describe; I would have committed suicide without any regret. The following evening I searched again for the only girl in the world. As I walked along the beach I beheld a couple in a most compromising attitude. They were hugging, kissing and moving. When I got near enough I saw that it was Monique and a new cavalier.

On the following Sunday my parents came down to see me. They made it a surprise visit, and when a messenger told me I was wanted at the gate I had no idea who was there. We went into Brighton for the day, which passed



all too quickly. They were both sad and asked me if I could not possibly stay in England. I told them we wouldn't go overseas for months and the war would be over long before we reached the end of our training.

When they left in the last train I felt thoroughly wretched. I made all kinds of good resolutions to leave wine and women alone, to avoid evil thoughts and deeds, to be a veritable Sir Galahad. Alas for my good resolutions! I kept none of them and stooped to despicable deeds, some of which make me blush with shame when I look back through the years and see certain events that stand out like milestones on the road I have traversed. Unlike Rousseau I dare not boast that, when the last trumpet-call is heard I shall proudly proclaim that I was as good as any other man.

Many of our misdeeds were done in a spirit of bravado, to shock convention. Baudelaire was in the habit of starting a conversation in a restaurant with the words "After having assassinated my poor old grandfather," and would startle a peaceful table-companion by asking him if he liked crunching walnuts, and informing him that it was as pleasant as crunching the brains of little children. Most of us were like the author of the "*Fleurs du Mal*." Suddenly freed from the restraints of civilized life we delighted to *épater le bourgeois* and appear dare-devils, swashbucklers who despised civilian decorum and cant.

## CHAPTER VI

A NUMBER of new N.C.O.s were created the following week and several were obviously not the most efficient of us. One or two of the new lance-corporals were worthy of promotion but not so the others.

There was a little fellow named Barton in my room. He had been a tailor and made a useful sum every week by doing jobs for the men. He always looked dirty, had black teeth, and a complexion the colour of parchment. His physique was nothing to boast about, although he seemed wiry enough. One Saturday night he came in drunk and challenged anyone to a wrestle. He looked so weedy that I laughed at him and told him not to be foolish. He became really angry and shouted: "Come on, you, I'll bet you ten bob I pin you in as many minutes."

"All right you abortion, it's a bet," cried I, somewhat nettled by his truculent attitude. I rather fancied my chance, as I was filling out every day, and far more robust than a couple of months before. Palliasses were dragged forward and we grappled together. I discovered at once that he knew far more about wrestling than I did, and I had to keep on the defensive, contenting myself with wriggling out of one hold after another. As I was about two stones heavier than my opponent it speaks volumes for his skill. After we had struggled for some time he secured a punishing body-scissors and jerked my head back until I thought my neck was going to break. He held on grimly to his hold and I had to tap submission. It was then discovered that the bout had lasted twelve minutes and much to my surprise I was adjudged the winner. When I refused to take the money Barton insisted on buying beer with it, and brought it in two enormous buckets. There were six of us in the room and we went to bed blind-drunk.

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It was the first time I went to roost with my boots on. The tailor confided that in his young days he had been a champion light-weight professional wrestler, and comforted me by saying that I had resisted much longer than he had expected.

Church parades were compulsory, which was a great blunder. Most of us detested the whole business, and indulged in a good deal of profanity each time the parade came round. There was a large wooden hall used as a church; and a chaplain, arrayed in a badly fitting officer's uniform, preached a lot of bilge. He was the poorest speaker I've ever heard and would send the most devout to sleep. He had no voice, no personality, and precious little intelligence. He usually told us how wicked the Germans were, how desirable to blot them out because they had violated Belgian neutrality, giving us sundry proofs of God's partiality for the Allies. One heard men whispering: "Put a sock in it"; and other exclamations of derision. I sometimes sat in the back row and round me were men surreptitiously smoking and playing cards for money. It wasn't long before I joined them. When we returned to our room after a particularly bellicose sermon preached from the text:

"And stay ye not, but pursue after your enemies, and smite the hindmost of them; suffer them not to enter into their cities: for the Lord your God hath delivered them into your hand," Richardson, a tall powerful fellow who had been a stoker, blurted out:

"I'd rather do fatigues than go inside that blasted church again. Christ never encouraged wars; He was a pacifist. In Germany they are going to church and saying God is on their side just like we are. We've got to fight now we're in, but for Christ's sake don't let us pretend that God is with us."

"What I want to know," interjected another who had been sailor, gold-digger, bronco-buster and several other things, "is why we are forced to go to that bloody church an' listen to a lot of bunk. If a man wants to go, well an' good, but by forcing him you encourage blasphemy, gambling and hatred in a building where there should be only love an' concord."

"If that damn parson believes what 'e says 'e ought ter be carryin' a rifle an' pack, not punchin' the Bible," shouted Plant. "This is a war not a prayer-meeting."

The following morning I was on sentry-go at the main gate when a car drove up and a short, thick-set officer jumped out. I spotted the red band on his cap, the red tabs and collection of ribbons on his breast, and was rather nervous as I had never seen a general at close quarters before. I bellowed for the guard to turn out, which they did, and the great man inspected them. After dismissing them he spoke to me for a couple of minutes and asked me if I had any complaints. I said, "Yes, sir, they are keeping us here too long and the war will be over long before we see any fighting."

"You'll get all the fighting you want and more before it's over, my boy," he chuckled, jumped into the car and was driven away by an immaculate and sphinx-faced corporal. It was rumoured that the visitor was Sir William Robertson, but it might have been merely a rumour. We lived on them. Most of them originated in the latrines. One day we were going to India, another to Egypt. Then the Germans had sunk all our fleet or were asking for peace. The astounding fact was that the men seemed ready to believe any old yarn that came along. That was due probably to the future being so uncertain.

There were a number of Indians in Brighton; tall dignified warriors who looked far more intelligent and aristocratic than most Europeans. Some were badly wounded and I visited them in the Pavilion. It was a pleasure to speak to those among them who could speak English. They were courteous and charming in their manners. One was a highly educated man and told me the story of the Indian epics Mahābhārata and Rāmāyana. He carried a copy of Sakuntala in Sanskrit and translated the most beautiful passages, also poems from Rabindranath Tagore. He enthused over the Vedic poets and explained their charm in perfect English. I corresponded with that gentleman until a letter was returned marked "Killed in Action."

My visits to the Indians prompted me to take cigarettes to some British Tommies in a small convalescent hospital

facing the sea. A few were playing football in the grounds, many were sitting or lying in various postures. Of the first group I approached, one had lost an arm, the second both legs and the third was blind. They talked to me of Mons and the retreat, during which they dropped from utter weariness.

"Thank God I'm out of it," said the legless one, and I stared at him in amazement, beginning to realize that the horrors of war were of a kind one didn't usually contemplate when the bands played and the crowds cheered. The grim side of the picture was kept out of sight as much as possible, painted as it was in blood and composed of horrors indescribable. One wreck was being pushed across the lawn in a bed on wheels. He had been wounded in the back and the spine was affected; he would be a cripple for life. Three men kept in the background, their faces hidden by bandages. They had been horribly disfigured by a shell-burst, and their comrades said that when their wounds were dressed it was enough to make one sick with horror. I went away praying to God that I would be killed instantaneously rather than crippled like some of those I had just seen.

Such is the heedlessness of youth that I forgot all about the mangled wretches as soon as I arrived back in barracks. There was a fight in progress when I returned. One gladiator had called out to the other, "How's yer belly off for spots?" and the other answered, "Mind yer own muckin' business." Such scraps took place very frequently, but were usually forgotten as soon as they were over. Certainly there was practically no animosity after the event. Most of the men were quick-tempered and an argument often ended in a bout of fisticuffs.

Certain it was that when two pals got drunk they would, as often as not, have a stand-up fight, stripped to the waist, in the middle of the room. The next day they went to the canteen as friendly as ever.

Next day being Sunday we had the usual compulsory church parade. A little chap with a long face, bushy eyebrows and enormous ears announced to the sergeant that he could not go to church as he had changed his religion. The N.C.O. was amazed:

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"And what the hell do you know about religion?" he demanded.

"Well, I've been reading a book and can no longer be happy as C. of E." (Church of England).

"What d'yer want to be, Wesleyan, Baptist, Catholic, or what?"

"My religion is called Shinto," proudly answered the private.

"Look here, if I have any more of your old buck I'll shove you in clink," was the irate rejoinder.

"I don't care if I'm persecuted for my faith, but I must make my declaration before men," quoth the proselyte.

The sergeant was nonplussed, but remembering that I had had a little schooling, came to me and whispered: "Is there a religion called Shinto?"

"It was the religion of Japan before the adoption of Buddhism," I replied, rather proud of my catholic reading.

The N.C.O. strode back to his place in front of the squad and said quietly: "Look here, Mr. Shinto" (he usually started his peroration by "Look here"), "I've put you down for scrubbing the latrine on Sunday mornings, that will give you peace and time to meditate on the vanity of earthly things."

The follower of Shinto marched away in response to a sharp command to start his new avocation. He told us afterwards that he had seen in some book mention of Shinto, and thought its adoption would be a good way of avoiding church parades, as the authorities would be unlikely to seek a Shinto priest to minister to one man.

In turning out my kit I came across the suit in which I left home. For some weeks I thought it would do for demobilization but gradually became less sanguine about the early termination of hostilities, so resolved to get rid of it. When I took it to the Jew who kept a second-hand shop near the barracks he offered me half a crown for it. I was in no mood for haggling and took the money. It is true that the suit was rather the worse for wear as a result of the treatment it had received since enlistment, but the son of Abraham made a good bargain. I felt that if I ever came out of the army my old clothes would be far too small

as I had already filled out considerably, and was sturdier in every way than the youth who walked into the recruiting-office a couple of months before.

Signalling-drill provided much amusement. Two men stood near the wall on one side of the square and sent messages to two others on the far side about two hundred yards away. Each pair took turns at sending and receiving. When the N.C.O. in charge wandered away the foulest messages were sent, each pair telling their *vis-à-vis* home truths about the defects in their persons, intelligence and ancestry.

Walking home from town one evening I came upon a soldier lying in the gutter. In accordance with the unwritten law that one had always to assist a comrade back to barracks, I pulled him to his feet and struggled along with him as best I could. He muttered a bit and then said fairly distinctly: "*Miseris succurrere discis*," and I recognized a man who had stood near me in Pressing barracks watching the farce of the broken latrine pole. He spoke in a cultured voice and expressed a desire to rest, so we sat down on the side of the road, all houses having been left behind. The helpless one groaned aloud and I advised him to stick his fingers down his throat. He attempted to follow my instructions but was too drunk. Ignoring his protests, I did the job for him and the result was surprisingly effective. The patient recovered sufficiently to speak fairly coherently. He informed me that he had been a non-resident master in a prep. school near Oxford and had a wife who was a holy terror. She forbade him to smoke, drink, or go out in the evening. To save money she did without a servant, and Sampson (for that was his name) had to act as domestic drudge. Naturally when the war came along it brought a gleam of hope, and the victim of hen-peckery asked permission to enlist. It was sternly refused, so one day during the vacation, Sampson walked into Oxford, had a couple of drinks at the "Red Lion" and promptly enlisted. Not daring to face his better half for fear of physical violence, he rang her up and said: "Mary, I've enlisted," ringing off before the storm burst. He then wrote to her informing her that it was everyone's duty to fight

for his country and that she would be proud of him when he returned from the war with a string of medals. He was about thirty-five, slim and a little below medium height. He looked healthy but was certainly not a Samson. He chuckled with glee as he spoke of the perfect freedom he had won, and hoped the war would last as long as the siege of Troy. That led him on to explain that the so-called siege of Troy was not strictly a siege of Troy at all, giving me a detailed account of Schliemann's explorations on the site of the ancient city. That was followed by a discourse on the different accounts of Helen's death, all of which I listened to with amused interest, for the man was soaked in classical history and legend.

We returned to barracks at midnight, making a long detour to avoid the sentry. Creeping near the back wall I threw up a stone and attracted the attention of my pals. They lowered the rope that we kept for such contingencies but Sampson was still too drunk to climb. It was necessary to tie it round his middle and he was hauled up like a sack of corn, having an unpleasant passage, swaying and bumping on all projections. When he had been disentangled the rope was let down again and I went up hand over hand. After putting my charge to kip in his room I returned to my own doss.

I met a most charming girl in Brighton, one evening as I passed along Ditchling road. She was coming out of a house that stood some distance from the others and an Irish terrier seemed to take a dislike to the violin-case she was carrying. The animal started to snarl and appeared a ferocious brute. He would certainly have bitten her had I not dealt him a hefty kick in the ribs, sending him yelping away. The girl was so profuse in her thanks that I was quite embarrassed, but managed to stammer that I would like to escort her home. On the way I learnt that she had been to a music lesson and was the daughter of a retired business man who must have been opulent, for we stopped before an imposing mansion which my companion said was her home. I was invited in and she told her mother the story of the dog, with sundry exaggerations to impress her with my valour. The father was out and the mother was



going to spend the evening in town with him. When I told her my name she was rather surprised, and remembered that her husband had had dealings with my father. When her mother had gone the girl asked me if I wished to resume my walk and I gallantly replied that I would enjoy it so much more if she would accompany me.

"But I don't think it would be quite proper."

"Why not?"

"Because you would think me rather fast."

"Nonsense, I think you are perfectly charming."

"But what would people say?"

"What people?"

"Well, my people."

"They wouldn't mind. Besides, they know my people, so we are not really strangers."

"Very well, but I mustn't stay out long."

She was rather a fine girl, well educated and devoid of that prudery that makes so many girls of her age awkward and artificial. She was nineteen and had just left a finishing school in Switzerland. We climbed over the hill and sat down on a corner of the golf links. I was asked a number of questions about my life and answered truthfully. She thought it must be thrilling to be a soldier, but didn't like the drunken ones who fought in the street. It was extremely refreshing to sit near a girl with a blue silk dress and fine stockings after the thick socks, heavy boots and rough clothing of my comrades. She asked me why I wore such heavy boots and was amused when I took off my hat and she read the regimental motto, "*Audax et celer*."

"How could you be speedy in boots that weigh at least ten pounds?"

A vanity bag was produced and Daisy amused herself dabbing powder on my face. Then she showed me a small bottle of perfume labelled "*Un jour viendra*," and I asked her what would come one day or what would happen when the day came that the perfume promised.

"Why it means a day will come with love and joy. Don't you think so?"

"It certainly will to you."

"What do you mean?"

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"That with youth, beauty and wealth you will not lack suitors."

"I should hate to be married for money."

"You are much too beautiful for that to happen."

"You are an adept at flattery."

"I am merely stating facts."

"What qualities would you look for in a girl?"

"In what girl?"

"The girl you marry, of course."

"But perhaps I shall never marry."

"Haven't you ever been in love?"

"Heaps of times."

"Then why didn't you get married to one of them?"

"Probably because it was calf-love. Besides love never lasts."

I told her, in a jocular manner, how we spent our time, avoiding the sordid and brutal side of it, also some funny incidents fit for a delicate ear. After several meetings I was able to hold her hand and put my arm round her; but try as I would I could not kiss her until one evening we were alone on the heath under a starry sky. The moon was so bright that we could see sheep grazing a long way off. After trying to reach her lips, I said:

"Very well, if you don't want to let me kiss you I shall not try again."

"I don't think it right to kiss men."

"I'm not asking you to kiss men in general but the particular one who is madly in love with you."

"I've always been told it isn't right."

"But in what way would it be wrong?"

"I don't know, but it may be wrong."

"Well, as long as we are not harming any third person and find pleasure in it, what harm are we doing?"

She laughed joyously, accused me of being a Sophist, and threw back her head so that it was easy to take her in my arms and press my lips on hers. She trembled and hugged me as she lay stretched out on my coat, digging her heels into the turf. Like a young animal she felt the powerful promptings of sex, and uncontrollable spasms shook her body. At times she would resist my efforts to kiss her and,

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suddenly taking my head in her hands, would kiss my lips with unrestrained passion. When I looked down I saw her eyes were wet with tears.

"Why are you crying?"

"You will go away and we shall never meet again."

"I swear we shall unless you change your mind."

It was long after midnight when we turned to go home, but as I was free for the week-end and she had her key, that did not worry us. I felt I wanted to go on kissing her for ever. Such moments were so ecstatic that the recollection of them buoyed me up and made me sing even during the longest march in the rain. After we separated I counted the hours until the next meeting.

Like a bolt from the blue came the announcement that we were to leave immediately for an unknown destination. By great good luck I managed to slip away and spend the last evening with the most wonderful girl in the world. She wept when she heard the news and spoke about securing a special licence so that we could get married without loss of time. However, I pointed out that we were both minors and it was unlikely her parents would consent until we were a little older.

"Will you promise to write to me every day?" she asked with tears in her eyes.

"It may not be possible to write every day, but I shall certainly do so as often as possible."

Before meeting my fair charmer I longed to get away from Lanshore, but when the time came to part I would have given all I had in the world to stay.

She clung to me on the sofa, and after locking the door, we hugged and caressed in the most extravagant manner, swearing that nothing would ever separate us.

"When we get married we are going to have the most wonderful house, designed by ourselves, and there love will reign supreme. We shall have two beds, for I've heard that one is uncomfortable for two, but we shall lie hugging in one until we are ready to fall asleep."

I got back to barracks at midnight and found all the rooms in considerable disorder, packing being in full swing. At such times all were "scrounging," which was really

stealing, but it appeared to be permissible to make up the deficiencies in one's kit by robbing any simpleton who was not sharp enough to look after his property. Men "found" things or "won" them in all manner of dubious ways; they would have indignantly repudiated the charge of theft.

The main body of troops went by road, but a few of us were left behind to clear up. As soon as the battalion had gone the twenty left behind set to work with sweeping-brushes, scrubbing-brushes, shovels and other utensils too numerous to mention. For two solid days we scrubbed, swept and cleaned. All rubbish had to be burnt or buried. I never thought so much paper, peel and cigarette-ends could accumulate in such a short time, for a general clean-up took place every week.

Before completing our labours we were required to march through the town in dirty stained overalls, with pails and brooms, to clean a hall the troops had used. It was amusing to watch people who thought we were convicts. In the busiest part of the High Street, I came upon my girl's mother getting out of a car with two other over-dressed females, fat, forty and pretentious. They were frequent visitors at the house and I had met them several times. As I drew near I heard one say: "Look at those dreadful men, prisoners, I suppose, wasting their time in prison while their comrades are at the front." When they saw me I gave a creditable salute, to which they responded by turning away in the haughtiest possible manner. I never saw her again. The mother was an arrant snob and could never stomach the thought of her only daughter being engaged to a common private.

For a few weeks I thought I should not survive the terrible blow.

But after a while the insouciance of youth reasserted itself and I found consolation in other maidens equally ready to lavish caresses on a young warrior.

On the third day of our scrubbing we were told that "the bloody barracks had never been so clean since it was built," and we entrained for a small town called Stamner in Somerset.

The main body of troops came in the day after our arrival,

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and were in surprisingly good condition considering that it was their first really long march. We were glad to see them appear, as the rear-guard of Lanshore became the advance-guard in Stamner and had to work like blazes preparing a rotten building for a thousand men. Then an extraordinary thing happened. Drafts were sent away and new men came. The new arrivals were almost recruits and knew far less about drill than we. I was eager to go away with a draft that was being prepared for overseas, but found out from the office that their destination was India. France was my objective, and although I would have liked to see India or any Eastern land, I had no intention of languishing there for the duration of the war. I had to bribe the Sergeant as my name was on the list. He had been at Mons and told me I was a bloody fool not to go to a quiet spot when I had the chance.

After two days in our factory several of us were moved out as it was overcrowded. Lieutenant Black was forming a new platoon and asked Sampson and me if we would like to join it. We accepted with alacrity, for Black was a fine officer; some of his colleagues were what the men called first-class rotters.

When we were lodged in a small room over an old public hall next to a pub our section was composed as follows:

*Corporal Fowler*, a Kentish man and a good fellow. Had served twelve years in the Regulars, mostly in India, Africa and the West Indies. He was of medium height, rather handsome and a good athlete. His age was not more than thirty-eight.

*Shorrocks*, a Cockney costermonger, small, wiry, thin of face and about twenty. Fancied himself as a wit.

*Stephens*, a puddler from Birmingham, tall and broad, about twenty-three.

*Jones*, a little Welshman from some village near Cardiff. Blue marks on his hands and face as a result of working in the mines; garrulous and excitable, age about thirty.

*Lamont*, a young Scot from Glasgow; grocer's assistant, nineteen, refined-looking and a champion swearer; splendid voice.

*Sampson.*

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*Greenling.*

*Myself.*

My eighteenth birthday fell on November 5 and the section proposed a little celebration in the "White Horse." I hesitated, as I had been a regular attendant at the local Band of Hope and had signed the pledge umpteen times to abstain from alcoholic liquors as beverages. How many times had I bawled out with a crowd of other kids :

"Dare to be a Daniel, dare to stand alone,

Dare to have a purpose true, and dare to make it known."

However, it was a most dismal room, cold and damp, so after a little hesitation I agreed to the celebration. There was not even a chair in that God-forsaken room ; we sat on the floor or the bed-boards.

We trooped into the pub and monopolized the back parlour. The corporal called for eight pints, and we soon emptied them. Each man called for drinks in his turn, and before we rolled out all had had eight pints. Needless to say, I was completely drunk. One or two of the seasoned toppers remained fairly sober. Sampson sat at the piano and at first played remarkably well, the quality of the music decreasing in direct ratio to the amount of ale he consumed. As soon as I was fairly tipsy I got up and made a speech, pledging the health of the section, and talking a lot of nonsense until the pianist cut me short with a tremendous burst of discord. He was quite drunk and his fingers got mixed up. Then one of them told a story that ran as follows :

"A village debating society met to discuss the most attractive part of a woman. One yokel said it was the hair, and gave suitable reasons. The next speaker said it was the eyes, and so on. At length an old fellow grabbed his hat and cried : ' I'm off before someone tells the truth.' "

Greenling gave some recitations and started off with some verses I had never heard before :

"It was a careless life I led  
When rooms like this were scarce so strange  
Not long ago. What breeds the change,—  
The many aims or the few years ?  
Because to-night it all appears  
Something I do not know again."

Stephens fancied himself as a singer and bellowed forth a song about love creeping into his heart and sunshine being everywhere as a result. He put his hand where he imagined his heart to be, looked up at the cobwebs and roared like a bull. The cobwebs shook, the windows rattled and the landlord looked in. "*Satis superque*," growled Sampson and left his seat for liquid refreshment. Lamont then sang, "Will you love the violet when you've lost the rose?" and sang well in spite of his fuddled state. Jones then obliged with a song called "When daffodils bloom," but contrary to expectations had a rotten voice and shrieked on the upper notes. Shorrocks announced that he had had enough of flowers and desired to sing about a vegetable. The theme was that he had never wronged an onion, so why should it make him cry? Greenling rose unsteadily to his feet and told the Miller's Tale from Chaucer and in the original. Some lines brought down the house and had to be repeated several times before the audience was satisfied.

At ten o'clock the landlord announced that it was usual to close at that hour, to which Sampson replied, "*Usus est tyrannus*," and urged him to keep his hostelry open a little longer, as it was a special occasion. We remained until midnight and then all but two were blind-drunk. This pair guided us up to our room where Greenling and Sampson started discussing the proofs of the existence of Homer. Greenling supported Vico and Wolf, Sampson said they were fools and entered into a detailed criticism of Wolf's *Prolegomenes*. I was too drunk to follow, and fell asleep while they were still talking.

Next day I had a splitting headache, and in the evening was on guard. During my second turn on sentry-go, from two to four in the afternoon, there was a terrific din in the hall which we used for stores, and the guard was called out to arrest the disturbers of the peace. A pugilist from Glasgow and a military policeman had won a lot of money on the Crown and Anchor board and had got gloriously drunk. Foaming at the mouth and stripped to the waist they were doing their best to murder each other. The guard consisted of three others as young as myself and

Corporal Fowler. He did not appear in any way perturbed at the sight, and when the madmen put their backs to the wall and announced their intention of murdering any b—— who came near, he quietly told us what we were to do. I had to dive for the legs of one and the other members of the guard for other parts. Four extra men had been pressed into service to deal with the policeman. When the signal was given we dived for our men and in a short time had them securely held. The pugilist had managed to floor the corporal, and the policeman knocked out two men before being borne down by weight of numbers.

The next job was to carry them to the clink, which was over a mile away at the factory. The struggling captives were frog's-marched, and when they were too violent the corporal banged their heads on the ground, so that before we had proceeded very far they were in a bloody mess. I was between the pugilist's legs and he kept screwing his head round to see who was holding them, screaming the most frightful oaths and threatening to murder me as soon as he got loose. It was a horribly brutal business and I loathed it. As we wended our way down the main street the staid townspeople looked at us with horror and the women cried, "Shame! Look how they are ill-treating those poor men."

We were nearing the square when I spotted my parents on the pavement. They had written to say they were coming down for a day but had not specified which. Mother clutched father's arm and looked aghast. I yelled out that I would soon be back and we continued our journey. Our prisoner struggled so violently with his legs that I was getting weak, and just as we were in sight of the factory gates, he wrenched one leg away with irresistible strength and gave me a kick in the stomach that made me sink unconscious to the ground.

I woke up in the cottage hospital at six o'clock in the evening and found my parents sitting at my bedside. My abdomen was extremely painful and I felt sick, but otherwise there was nothing wrong. Three days passed before I was allowed to get up and then I was excused duty for another two. My people stayed for a week.



My dreams of yore were fading, leaving in their place nothing but a feeling of the utter futility of everything, and the words of Stevenson seemed to describe my state: "To do anything because others do it, and not because the thing is good or kind or honest in its own right, is to resign all moral control and captaincy upon yourself, and go post-haste to the devil with the greatest number." My soul was sick and I knew not where to seek a remedy. I wanted to pray but could not, feeling it would be a mockery. With the loss of the little faith I once possessed there remained no sense of right and wrong, beyond certain humdrum conventions. I was being tossed about in a sea of doubt and despair. Thus I mused one evening.

My companions returned in a lively mood and sang until long after midnight, but even when they quietened down for the night I could not sleep.

Shorrocks had what he termed a brain-wave which would enable us to get to Bath, twenty miles away. He understood horses and knew the yard of a pub where a mess-cart belonging to the Artillery was kept. There were horse-lines near by and he thought it would be possible to take a horse from the lines, take it to the pub yard, harness it up, and drive off. Greenling and Sampson joined us and we reconnoitred the terrain. After some delay the man looking after the animals went to cut chaff in a little shed at the end of the lines. Shorrocks grabbed the nearest horse and quietly led it away while the rest of us hid round the corner. On arrival at the yard we held up the shafts while the costermonger backed the beast and harnessed him up. The brute stood over fourteen hands high, and the shafts were inclined at an angle of 45°. All the straps had to be let out to the last hole. We had passes for the day and hoped to get to our destination and back without anyone missing the horse and cart. The journey was rather uncomfortable, as the charger had an enormous stride and shook the cart like a shuttle. At times he kicked up his heels from sheer *joie de vivre*, and set off at a mad gallop.

"Too much oats an' too little work," grunted Shorrocks, hanging grimly on to the reins. He informed us that the

animal ought to have had a good day's work to be in good condition, but that until the guns and wagons arrived the artillery horses were eating their heads off in idleness. They were exercised a little each day, but that was not enough.

"They ought ter be damn glad we're takin' it out fer 'em else it might get obstrep'rous an' kick some poor swine," vouchsafed the driver, who now appeared to have the measure of his unruly animal.

We reached Bath after three hours' driving and stopped at a small inn just outside the town. There we quaffed some glorious beer and ate bread and cheese. The horse was well fed and we spent a few pleasant hours in the fashionable watering-place. After tea we started our journey back. About ten miles from Stamner we halted at a gorgeous old-fashioned pub and spent a most enjoyable couple of hours. The parlour was cosy, the landlord's daughter charming, and hops floated in the ale.

"Well, yer can't say abandon 'ops all ye who enter 'ere," remarked Shorrocks with a wink at the maid. Suddenly he turned to Greenling and said:

"But what beats me is why toffs like you join the bleedin' army when yer were comfortable at 'ome."

"Probably because, like many others, I was fed-up and wanted excitement," replied the learned one, blowing the froth off his pint.

"The great object in life is sensation—to feel that we exist, even though in pain. It is 'this craving void' which drives us to gaming—to battle—to travel—to intemperate, but keenly felt, pursuits of any description, whose principal attraction is the agitation inseparable from their accomplishment," quoted Sampson, and smiled a little oddly, as he usually did when not quite sober.

It was a stormy night when we drove into the yard where we had found the cart. Not a soul was abroad and we left the horse munching oats in the stable of the inn. Shorrocks explained that they would find it in the morning and would simply think it had strayed when the head-rope came undone. We got in safely, and often laughed when anyone spoke of a trip to Bath.

For several days nothing happened to break the monotony of strenuous training. On the following Sunday evening I walked to Wells, a charming old place with its wonderful cathedral. The bells were ringing sweetly over the meadows, calling the villagers to worship. I felt like a hungry man wandering outside a banquet hall and unable to go in. A fresh clean breeze blew in my face and rustled the leaves in the trees and hedges. The moon was scurrying along behind straggling clouds, a night bird cried overhead and I felt nearer to simple and eternal realities. There came upon me with irresistible force the conviction of my contamination, and never again would I be young in the sense I was young before I enlisted.

I had lost faith in God and humanity. The sordid and degrading things I had seen and heard during the past few weeks had left their mark upon me only too clearly ; nothing remained but stark disillusionment. I fell to wondering whether all wars had been as coarse and brutal as the one I found myself in, and as yet I had never seen the enemy. How true the words of Thackeray sounded : " It is well for gentlemen to talk of the age of chivalry ; but remember the starving brutes whom they lead—men nursed in poverty, entirely ignorant, made to take a pride in deeds of blood—men who can have no amusement but in drunkenness, debauch, and plunder. It is with these shocking instruments that your great warriors and kings have been doing their murderous work in the world ; and while, for instance, we are at the present moment admiring the Great Frederick as we call him, and his philosophy and his liberality, and his military genius, I, who have served him, and been, as it were, behind the scenes of which that great spectacle is composed, can only look at it with horror. What a number of items of human crime, misery, slavery, go to form that sum-total of glory ! "

I reached the cathedral and stood looking at the stained-glass windows and listening to the sweet singing.

I felt only a great yearning and a profound melancholy. In the regiment we ceased to be human beings and became numbers. There was no reverence or even respect for human personality. A man was an instrument for carrying

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a rifle and pack. He was being rapidly transformed into a very efficient destructive agent—but he had no soul, no self-respect, no rights. When a young soldier complained, an old one would say :

"They've got yer by the short 'airs now, me boy, an' can do anything with yer except put yer in the family way."

Those who make wars are responsible for the vices of those who serve, for men cooped up away from all home influences degenerate rapidly, lose all decency and in some respects become worse than beasts. They persist in their folly without becoming wise. All that we had been taught was a hollow sham, all our values were turned topsy-turvy, the gods of Treitschke and Nietzsche ruled the world.

## CHAPTER VII

NEXT morning I slipped out before first parade to a little shop where one could obtain tea and cakes. On the way back I was unlucky enough to meet the company commander, who promptly put me under arrest for absenting myself from the billet without permission, and I was marched to the office in company with four other prisoners. When I was called before the mighty one my cap was whipped off by the C.M.S. and the charge read out. The company commander was a tall dark fellow with an evil scowl. A regular officer trained at Sandhurst, he had served in India, and delighted in punishing men for the slightest offence. Failure to salute properly, a button not fastened, hat not on straight, buttons not polished enough, these and many other such things produced a crop of defaulters every day. I was requested to make a statement but declined, admitted my guilt and proffered no excuse. Lieutenant Black was present and the captain asked him for a report on my conduct. It was satisfactory, but the captain wanted a conviction and tried to goad me into insubordination.

"Don't you know that all military efficiency is based on good discipline?"

"Yes, sir."

"Do you think you joined the army to do as you damn well like?"

"No, sir."

"Then why the hell do you leave your billet without permission?"

"I've already stated that I have no excuse to offer."

"I'll bring you to heel, you insubordinate young pup."

"I had no intention of being deliberately insubordinate, sir."

"I'll let you off this time, but, by God, if you come before me again you will have cause to remember it."

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"Thank you, sir."

"I want no damn back-chat either; get to hell out of it."

The C.S.M. roared at me like a stuck pig to show his C.O. how ably he was backing him up, and once again I found myself a free man.

I slipped off to Bath the next evening and went to the theatre. The musical comedy was vulgar and stupid, girls kicking up their legs and dancing suggestive dances. The show was so dull that I walked out long before the end. I had no pass, but hoped to get in unobserved. As I approached the entrance to the billet the sentry bawled out:

"Halt! Who goes there?"

"Orderly Officer, visiting rounds," I replied, quick as thought. It was a sudden inspiration, for I realized that the sentry was Weston, a youth "sweating on the top line," i.e. working for a stripe. As I was wearing an officer's cap and coat that I had bought, he was completely deceived, and asked in an obsequious tone:

"Would you like a lantern, sir?"

"Yes, I want to see if the men are all in upstairs."

He hurried into the guard-room to get a light, and I bolted upstairs as fast as I could go. My pals had put my bed down and, hastily throwing the cap and coat under the bed-boards, I jumped into bed fully dressed and pretended to be asleep. Soon there was a commotion and Weston, accompanied by the N.C.O. in charge of the guard, came searching the building for the intruder. They, in their eagerness, fell over the trestle I had placed near the door and awoke the tired men:

"Get to hell out of here."

"Burglars, come on lads," shouted Shorrocks.

The lamp had been extinguished in the fall and the interlopers were given an unmerciful thrashing by many who were only too glad to pay off old scores. The corporal stormed and raved, but all protested that they thought burglars were in the room.

"I'll 'ave my own back for this, you swines," threatened the N.C.O. as he withdrew with a bloody nose and dusty uniform.

When they had gone we fastened the door and I related

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my escapade. Much joy was shown by all, especially as I had brought back a bottle of whisky for their consumption.

Next morning we were vaccinated and the needle must have been dirty, for my arm became badly swollen and I could not sleep at night. In the end I had to go to hospital, where the swelling gradually subsided. There was a big fellow in the next bed and he had several apoplectic fits, struggling and kicking on the floor. His face was convulsed and went blue. A nurse forced a pipe between his teeth and gradually he recovered. I felt sorry for the wretched man until another inmate came to my bed and whispered that the chap with the fits was working his ticket, and could simulate a fit whenever he liked. "Working one's ticket" meant behaving in such a way as to secure one's discharge from the army.

While I was awaiting the daily medical inspection that I hoped would declare me fit, an artillery driver was led in, his face covered with blood. He had been kicked by a horse and looked in a bad way. The doctor who examined my arm was satisfied, and authorized my discharge, so that I was able to rejoin my unit. My luck was out, however, for, on my return, I was detailed to groom some transport horses that had just arrived. Some of them were vicious brutes, and as I was bending down to do the front legs of one wicked-looking brute he kicked me in the mouth, removing three teeth and necessitating several stitches in the upper lip and another ten days in hospital. What annoyed me most of all was that I had a rendezvous with a very pretty girl whose address I had not got, so I lost sight of her for good.

When I left hospital the battalion was under orders to move. Great was the confusion; chaos reigned everywhere; there appeared to be a thousand commanders and as many conflicting orders. My pals had salvaged my few small possessions from the billet, and after a couple of hours' shouting, cursing, wrangling and sweating, all was ready.

After three days' marching we reached camp four miles from Winchester. Rain fell almost continuously during the journey and put our martial ardour to a severe test. Marching in the rain and sleeping in wet tents seemed to us a

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tremendous hardship and we cursed with gusto. There were fourteen men to each tent, and one usually woke up with sweaty socks in one's face. Shorrocks remained cheerful, being apparently accustomed to roughing it in all weathers.

"I wonder if it will ever stop raining?" repeated Sampson with monotonous regularity.

"Gor blimy, d'yer want jam on it?" demanded Shorrocks. "Wait till it's rainin' bullets an' yer s—— yerself with fright, then yer'll know yer in a bleedin' war; this is only a picnic."

The men sang at times but without much enthusiasm, for it is hard to be enthusiastic with rain running down one's shirt. They appeared to find some satisfaction in dismal melodies like "It's a lovely war."

"What d'yer want with eggs and ham  
When yer've plum and apple jain?  
Form fours, right turn,  
What d'yer do with the money yer earn?  
O! O! O! It's a lovely war."

Then from the rear would come:

"If the sergeant drinks yer rum,  
Never mind;  
He's entitled to a tot,  
But he drinks the bloody lot;  
If the sergeant drinks yer rum,  
Never mind."

There was a popular song about a tulip and a red rose to which a parody was wailed, much feeling being put into the lines:

"You stole our wenches,  
While we were in the trenches,  
Facing the angry foe."

Other efforts were greeted with: "Put a bloody sock in it," and we trudged on in silence. We straightened our backs while passing through towns and villages, casting longing eyes at the pretty girls, whom we desired to impress with our soldier-like bearing and general smartness. Greenling had a supply of chewing-gum and we chewed until it



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was finished. Jones had taken an overdose of Epsom salts before setting out as he had been constipated. He called it "costive-bound," but after a few hours on the road the purgative worked only too well and he had to run behind hedges and trees, finally being put under arrest for leaving the ranks without permission.

"Do they expect a man to s—— himself?" he complained after the umpteenth run behind some bushes.

The new camp was desolate and ill-prepared, so that hard work was necessary to make it fit for occupation. The tents were cold and damp, the parade ground a swamp, and conditions generally most uncomfortable.

I bought a pair of riding-breeches from an artillery man, because they looked smart, and he told a pitiful tale of poverty at home. I saw him drunk later in the evening, so presumed he flogged them for booze. However, I got the breeches on with much difficulty and spent the evening in Winchester, returning to camp at ten o'clock. It was impossible to get the newly acquired garment off and I went to bed with the breeches on, hoping they would come off more easily in the morning. Try as I would they remained firmly fastened on me and I appealed to my comrades for help. They dragged me round and round the tent by the legs, cursing and laughing at my plight. They tugged and heaved with all their might, all to no avail. Someone suggested I should catch hold of the pole, and when I did so it came down, bringing the tent down with it on top of a mass of profanity convulsed with mirth. At the finish I had to go on parade with the breeches under my trousers and looked a grotesque figure indeed. We all were awarded four days' C.B. for being late on parade.

After parade the breeches had to be cut off, and that was the last time I tried to wear clothing made for a smaller man. There was absolutely nothing to do at the camp in the evenings, and we spent most of them in a little pub in Winchester, where we had good beer and quiet. Greenling, Sampson and I were usually together, the others being busy hunting for skirt. Greenling was a shrewd fellow, had travelled much and had read omnivorously. One evening we were discussing democracy and he surprised me by his

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contempt for the democratic forms of government and what he termed "mob rule."

"It has been well said that democracy is the severest form of despotism," he declared. "Every fool outside a prison or lunatic asylum votes, and naturally statesmanship gives way to tub-thumping and vote-cadging. Look at history and see how long democracies have lasted. *Vox populi vox Dei* is the most arrant humbug one could well conceive. Democracies breed demagogues, those hateful shams that batten on popular ignorance and folly. An ancient said truly: 'Always curry favour with the people by saying sweet, palatable things to them; as to the other qualities necessary for a demagogue, you possess them; I mean you have a vilely raucous voice, your character is bad, and you are a lounger and a chatterbox.' Tocqueville has clearly shown how democracies dig their own grave and prepare a new despotism. The morality of the mob is a vile thing and the gospel of grab the only one they understand."

"Don't you think the people may be educated up to a sense of their responsibilities?" I asked.

"There is precious little education to-day," he replied. "Owing to socialistic legislation, every Tom, Dick and Harry thinks he must have free higher education, and we are turning out herds of half-educated nincompoops, who swell the army of unemployed clerks and despise manual labour. We are giving instruction, but education is perishing in this utilitarian age. A parson complained to me that his son had no bent for books and that he did not know what to do with the lad. I suggested making him a carpenter and the man looked insulted, more so when I reminded him that I was merely recommending the trade of his Master."

We returned to camp and lay talking in bed. Shorrocks, Jones and Lamont rolled in and fell over us, provoking a chorus of howls and curses.

At the end of the third week in December we entrained for Aldershot and once more found ourselves in barracks. I felt it was the last lap before going overseas. The barracks were splendid and comfortable. Discipline became even

more severe and training more exacting. The town was full of soldiers, hardly any civilians were to be seen. We dug deep trenches, fixed wire back and front, and spent long and glorious hours in the country, attacking and defending all kinds of positions. Gruelling marches ceased to have any terrors, for we were fit as fiddles, and felt we would soon be granted our hearts' desire, which was to cross the water and get into the real thing. Bayonet fighting strengthened the muscles of our arms and inured us to fatigue. Sacks were hung from cross-bars and we jumped several trenches, stuck the steel into the circle marked on the sack, pulled it out, jumped more trenches, and repeated the process five or six times. It was tiring work, for one's heavy ammunition boots weighed about a couple of pounds each, and when plastered with mud held one down like so much lead. I enjoyed the work, for I was young and fit, strong as a horse and full of zest. Sampson almost dropped at times, and cut rather a ridiculous figure with a badly fitting uniform and a small cap that stuck high on top of his head, for he had a massive cranium.

"Turn your bloody pig-sticker before pulling it out," roared the Sergeant-Instructor. "Don't forget your enemy has bones, sinews, muscles and guts; if you can't pull your weapon out quickly, some of his pals are sure to dig you in the guts."

We became experts at parry and thrust, and practised bringing dummies down by smashing them over the head with the butt or jabbing them fiercely in the private parts. Even the slow-witted began to realize what war meant and the effect of a few inches of cold steel in a man's bowels. We were ordered to look fierce while running at the figures, and were encouraged to curse and swear to help terrify the enemy.

I was proud of the company, for the dirty ragged crowd that had lounged about the barrack square at Pressing, heterogeneous and undisciplined, had been transformed into a smart unit. Brown of face and hard as nails, we looked as if we had been soldiers all our lives.

A number of men got Christmas leave and went home for a few days. I was not one of the lucky ones and we

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celebrated in barracks. Beer flowed like water and at night we were all roaring drunk. A corporal said he was going for more beer and collected money with which to buy it. He did not return, so Greenling and I went in search of him, as we had each handed over a few shillings. After a long search we found him lying blind-drunk on a heap of coal near the cook-house.

Shorrocks, Stephens, Jones and Lamont were having a somewhat heated argument about conscription :

"Every b—— ought to be called up as soon as a war breaks out," declared Lamont.

"No bloody fear," retorted Stephens; "if they don't want to come, let 'em stay at 'ome an' we'll win the muckin' war without 'em. Would you like to fight with conscripts?"

"That's all very fine," cried Shorrocks, "but them b——s are living on the fat of the land, an' will 'av' all the best jobs when the fightin' 's over. My old man came 'ome from South Africa after two years and three wounds, an' was told 'e was no longer required owin' to reorganization. Some of us will be glad ter pick fag-ends out of urinals when we get back ter civvy life."

The men who had not yet been inoculated were paraded next day and informed that they must be done or forfeit their leave. As far as I could gather, inoculation was not compulsory, as a few cranks had been kicking up a row in Parliament, thundering against the horrible iniquity of rendering men immune to disease against their will. Had it not been for vaccination and inoculation nine-tenths of the fighting men would have perished from disease.

There was one loon who stubbornly refused to undergo either vaccination or inoculation. I have never seen a more woebegone individual, tall, thin, scraggy neck and lantern jaws, round-shouldered and pigeon-chested; he had been sailor, tramp, bookie's tout, street hawker and many other less reputable things. No one could understand how any doctor ever passed him. Totally illiterate and yet most dogmatic on questions he knew nothing about. The Colonel was a big, pompous man, red of face and always most dignified. He passed along the line of recalcitrants, asking each one why he refused inoculation. Most of them

had bees in their bonnets and stoutly stuck out for their rights. They rejoiced in the knowledge that there was something the army could not compel and gave the queerest answers to the Colonel's questions. They were what sailors call "sea-lawyers" and a thorough nuisance, although only about five per cent. of the battalion. Arriving opposite the delinquent the C.O. said in a breezy tone:

"Now tell me why you will not be inoculated."

"Because I don't believe in it, sir," answered the scarecrow, trying to look intelligent.

"But what the hell do you know about it?" snapped the C.O., who was not blessed with the ability to suffer fools gladly.

"I've read all about it," asserted the man, who had never read anything in his life.

"Tell me this, my man, why did you join the army?" roared red-face, now quite in a rage.

"Well, sir, I must have been drunk," replied dirty Dick with great composure and a spasmodic twitching of his long and cadaverous features.

The sergeants had a cook who answered to the name of Percy. He was over sixty, short, fat, and without a tooth in his head. He had been a sailor and hailed from Southampton. For years he had been running to South and East Africa with the Union-Castle boats. When he went to enlist he dyed his white hair and borrowed a complete set of teeth from a pal. Standing in front of the doctor Percy said his gums were a trifle sore and he had taken the teeth out to obtain a little relief. The medical officer was taken in and passed the old rascal as fit for active service. Percy chuckled with glee while telling us the story. He bought a bottle of a well-known brand of hair dye and poured it over his head.

"I dyed my bloody ears, neck, and back, for the stuff run all over my 'ead and down to my backside; on my 'ands too. Couldn't get the muckin' stuff off for days. Piebald, that's what I was, patches of black an' white all over my bleedin' nut."

The odd job man about the cook-house was Willie Thompson, good-natured and mentally deficient. When

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one spoke to him he would grin feebly and go on with his sweeping or peeling. He had been a shepherd on the Yorkshire moors before the war, and must have had a smart dog or there would have been damn few sheep left. Willie always spoke to the cooks with extreme deference, for he dreaded returning to duty with its drills, hard work, sentry-go and severe discipline.

The officers' cook was a giant of a man named Jack Bristow. He claimed to have been a boiler-maker in civilian life, but there was no doubt about his ability to cook; he could even make cakes. His admirers boasted that Jack could put his fist through a sack of flour, and although I never saw it done I did not doubt his ability to do it, for his arms were as thick as an ordinary man's thighs. As soon as the officers found out about his dexterity in the art of Mrs. Beeton he was promptly commandeered and Jack grew fat.

The others used to sit over their dixies with cigarettes hanging from their lips. When a little ash fell into the stew they calmly went on stirring, assuring any spectators that what wouldn't fatten would fill. The first men to be served were "staff wallers," fellows with cushy jobs and a great opinion of themselves. Most of them were clerks with greasy hair carefully parted in the middle. After they had been served the bugle sounded "Cook-House" and we rushed with our mess-tins, hungry as lions. The ration was polished off in a few minutes, and those in funds went to the canteen for biscuits or cake. The officers and sergeants had first pick of the grub, and as often as not the men went short. The officers received a good ration allowance, but their cook always carried off the lion's share of the raw supplies.

The barracks became badly overcrowded when fresh troops arrived, and our cooks performed their duties under a tin roof on props in the yard. It was difficult to divide up the rations for each section, as hungry men are apt to be angry men and quarrels often broke out over the distribution. In our little group we managed tolerably well, for Sampson and Shorrocks didn't eat much, and that sometimes left more for Stephens who needed two men's

rations. Some of the rascals delighted to talk about the most disgusting topics while we were eating, presumably to put us off our food.

One day Sampson was sick as a result of some incredibly obscene remarks passed in his hearing and had to leave his dinner. Stephens seized the two tormentors and knocked their heads together until I thought their skulls would crack, telling them that if ever they came near us again at meal times he would flatten their bloody faces. The victims picked themselves up and slunk away.

A week after Christmas I got leave. The atmosphere at home was not happy, for mother had a premonition about our impending departure for the front. The seven days passed quickly and I was not really sorry, for I could not bear to see her, with her sad eyes full of anxiety and fear. She had lost all her former cheerfulness and seemed to regard me as already killed. I tried hard to reassure her, to make her laugh, to interest her in some hobby, but it was useless. On the day of my return to the section we went and had our photographs taken in a group. The poses were most weird and the man thought we were mad and made us pay in advance. We then repaired to a pub for the evening and had a merry time. There was a Scotsman there in a kilt and Lamont insisted on trying it on, taking off his trousers to do so. He then did what he called a Highland fling. Then he spoke Scotch to the Jock and we gave up trying to follow.

Sampson started throwing pint pots at the dart-board and when the landlord came in to see what all the row was about, one of the pots caught him on the head and he sank to the floor with a gurgle. However, he was an old soldier and soon came round. We sat on Sampson and told the publican that our pal had suffered from sunstroke in India and was at times a bit queer. The pedagogue promised to behave properly and we released him. He jumped on a chair and bawled a poem of which I only remember the closing lines:

" 'You are old,' said the youth, 'and your jaws are too weak,  
For anything tougher than suet;  
Yet you finished the goose, with the bones and the beak—  
Pray how did you manage to do it?'

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'In my youth,' said his father, 'I took to the law,  
And argued each case with my wife;  
And the muscular strength it gave to my jaw,  
Has lasted the rest of my life.'"

As we left the pub a military policeman tried to arrest us, so we flattened his face in the mud and ran for our lives. It was a dark night and identification would be difficult. Next day the C.Q.M.S. tried to make me his assistant, but I persisted in my refusal. Finally I agreed to help until the books and stores were straight, for his late assistant had made a hell of a mess of things and then deserted. I was made a lance-corporal and felt a damn fool wearing one of the stripes that our little group cordially detested.

My pals came over, pretending to shed tears over my renegation.

"I suppose you won't know your old pals now," said Sampson.

"I'll wager you a quid I'm back in less than a month," I exclaimed.

I slept in a little room behind the stores and spent most of my time getting the ledgers straight, checking stores, and driving over to the ordnance stores to complete equipment. Each day I attended at the company store to issue clothing, boots, and sundries to those who produced articles condemned as worn-out or unserviceable. A considerable amount of stealing at the stores had alarmed Jackson and we had to keep watch. The Quarter-Blake hid behind some shelves while I attended to the men. As they stood in a line stretching from the door to the middle of the room a little Irishman snatched some things from a shelf and stuffed them under his jacket. Jackson rushed out and pulled some socks, a couple of shirts, and a pair of boots, from Paddy's voluminous tunic. It was proved that he had borrowed a bigger man's garment in order to get more under it. The unfortunate thief was sentenced to two years in a prison at Aldershot known as the "Glass House," of which soldiers who had served sentences in it spoke with horror. According to them everything was done at the double, and for the slightest breach of discipline the



offender was floored by a muscular warder. The only consolation was that the Irishman had a bad record and had been a notorious criminal in the Scotland Road district of Liverpool. He had served three years for killing his wife, and escaped the gallows because they were both drunk, so that the verdict was manslaughter with extenuating circumstances. At the court-martial I had to give evidence against him and when sentenced he shouted that he would murder Jackson and me as soon as he got out. Most of the men sympathized with him as a victim of bureaucracy.

After the above event I became a full corporal and dined in the Corporals' Mess. The idea appeared to be that if we ate with the men discipline might be weakened. Floyd and I became good pals and had many a merry evening together. He was a curious person, and hardly ever spoke of his private affairs. When we went out among refined people his behaviour was absolutely impeccable, but in a "rough house," as the soldiers termed a brawl, he could fight like a tiger.

One evening we were sitting in the mess drinking beer. The time was about eight o'clock and there were only a few N.C.O.s present. Suddenly a big fellow with blood-shot eyes and a savage expression stood in the doorway. In a tremendous voice he yelled out, "All corporals are bloody muckin' bastards."

Floyd put down his glass and said quietly, "Does that include me?"

"Yes, you as well, you b——."

My companion drained his glass and walked towards the door, looking very grim. Outside both took their coats off and I held Floyd's, while the provoker threw his on the ground. The latter was a veritable giant and a redoubtable tough. I had heard tales of his favourite methods and was determined to join in the scrap if he resorted to unfair tactics. His usual stunt was to disable his opponent with a kick.

When they were ready I shouted "Time!" and they sparred for an opening. Like a flash Floyd jumped forward and landed his adversary a punch on the jaw that sounded like the cracking of a tree in a storm. The big fellow

toppled backwards down two or three steps into a latrine where his head struck the concrete floor with a sickening thud. I hastily examined the back of his head which was badly cut, and was relieved to find that he was still breathing. Two of his cronies who had scented a fight carried him away and he soon recovered from the concussion. Floyd had a hand like a football next day, for the knuckles were dislocated.

There was another corporal who had been at Mons. Built like a young oak, he also was endowed with exceptional strength and had been on the gymnastic staff. One evening in the mess he had had a few drinks and offered to bet that he would not go back to France again. The others told him we would all go and damn soon, judging by the active preparations that were going on. He repeated that he would bet any one five pounds, but there were no takers. He had been wounded over the right eye by a shell splinter and although the scar was deep and ugly he had been passed fit for active service. It seemed anything but fair that such men were rushed back to the trenches as soon as they were discharged from hospital, while thousands were walking about in civilian clothes as if they had never heard of a war. Although I hated the whole business, I had no time for the pacifists. It seemed to me that the nation was comparable to a ship in distress that needed all hands on deck. A certain number calmly refused to pull a rope or furl a sail, under the pretext that it was no fault of theirs, as the navigating officer had blundered. The whole system that permitted such wholesale murder was wrong and one prayed that the day would dawn when humanity would outlaw such conflicts; but meanwhile we were in it, and being in, had no option but to fight like hell until it was over. Then would be the time to push forward the work of peace.

I was sitting in my room one evening when my old pals came to see if I had deserted them. I was glad to see them for I was feeling down in the dumps and as glum as an undertaker's apprentice. Never of an equable disposition, I was either bubbling over with mirth or in the depths of black despair. We repaired to a little hostelry just

outside the town and the regular customers must have thought that the Bedlamites had broken out. We sang, danced, and broke the table and a lot of glasses.

We had to pay a few pounds to the landlord for the damage done; Jones lost his hat, Lamont a tooth, Greenling his spectacles, and Sampson got a black eye from a sailor. I slammed the big tar one in the dial, knocked him over a bench, and he roared that he would murder me, so I ran like blazes before he could get up.

When I woke up next morning I had a sausage, a song called "Because," a beer measure and plate of false teeth in my pockets. They were claimed later by Sampson.

One day I discovered that I had a surplus of a few pounds in the men's messing account, and suggested to Smith that they should have a treat. Having secured his approval I proceeded to interview the cooks, who were by this time in a real cook-house, a hut with windows all round, in the centre of the yard. Previously they had been exposed to the weather, and were forgiven much bad cooking on that account. However, there was no improvement when conditions improved.

"I want some good duff for the company," said I, poking my nose into the smoky interior of the kitchen.

"Give us the stuff and we'll make the finest bloody duff yer ever saw," promised one. I explained the scheme, and told them I wanted to know what to order, and how much of each thing. At last I got a list which included 120 lbs. of flour, 20 lbs. currants, 15 lbs. treacle, 10 lbs. sugar and other ingredients, the names of which I have forgotten. Real army cooks, who had been through a proper course, could turn out the most surprising dishes, but our imbeciles were hopeless. When the ingredients had been procured, I left them arguing whether the duff should be baked or boiled, and forgot all about the matter until at dinner-time I heard a terrible commotion, and on looking out of the window saw the cooks in full flight across the square, and behind them scampered an irate mob who pelted them with lumps of a hard resilient material which looked uncommonly like rubber. It turned out that the cooks had mixed the ingredients in a big tin bath and

boiled them in an enormous sack. When they thought the boiling was complete they tried to cut up the huge mass, but no knife would touch it. It was with great difficulty hewn in pieces by means of a heavy axe.

When the men lined up outside the cook-house, expecting a special treat, they were solemnly presented with a lump of mystery the size of half a brick. The hungry recipients hacked away with their jack-knives, but could make no impression on the stuff, that would bend and bounce but never break. In fury they bombarded the cooks and broke all the windows in the cook-house. I secured a piece of the so-called duff and used it as a paper-weight. It is still in existence somewhere, for it looked as indestructible as the Pyramids of Egypt.

Our training was almost completed when it was announced that Lord Kitchener would inspect us, on a wide plain near Aldershot. We had about a week in which to prepare, and it was a week of perfect hell. Inspections were held every day, and a speck of rust or dirt brought down the wrath of the gods. Cleanliness is all very well, but turning up men's boots to see if the instep had been polished was going a bit too far. Our heads had to be shaved to satisfy the fools who interpreted short hair to mean no hair at all. Some officers and N.C.O.'s were perfectly ferocious in their quest for meticulous enforcement of the letter of the law. Every day we underwent a multitude of minor inspections, and stood cursing while the inspectors undid buckles and straps in the hunt for a speck of dirt. Men carried rags and metal polish, rubbing their arms and equipment until they shone.

The great day arrived, and it rained cats and dogs all morning. Great-coats were donned, and we sweated like bullocks as we marched over the sandy plain whose surface engulfed the feet. When the rain stopped, no order was given to roll coats, as the great man was expected at any minute, and for three hours we stood at ease until suddenly a sharp order called us to attention, and the battalion presented arms like one man. The bayonets gleamed in the air, and one felt a thrill of pride in the knowledge that one belonged to a smart and efficient fighting-machine.

With all the grouching there was a fine *esprit de corps*, and most of us would have admitted that we preferred strict discipline to the sloppy rag-time methods of certain units of the New Army, before they were taken over by regular officers, backed up by sergeant-majors who knew their work, and did marvels licking raw material into shape.

I saw Kitchener at close quarters, as he rode past surrounded by his escort. He looked tired and worn, but impressed me as a commanding personality. On the return march I found myself near the cooks, who were sweating like Falstaff in a Turkish bath, for they hadn't carried a pack for months, and were in a hopeless condition. Mopping their steaming brows they stumbled, cursed, and kept up with difficulty. An active soldier can drink any amount of beer of an evening, for the strenuous life keeps him fit, but the cooks swilled booze every evening, and during the day as well, without taking any exercise, so were in no trim for marching with rifle, pack, and full equipment. They had filled their water-bottles with whisky, and that only aggravated the evil, leaving them more sweaty and exhausted than before.

I received a message from an old school chum who, unknown to me, had enlisted in the Field Artillery, and was stationed at Ewshott. He invited me over and extended the invitation to any pals who might care to come along. All the section went, hoping to have a successful evening. I was in funds and hired a taxi, although the driver demurred, at first pointing out that it was illegal to carry so many; however, he accepted when I agreed to compensate him for the risk, which wasn't great on account of the darkness. The journey out was uneventful and Purver was waiting near the gate. He told me he enlisted two days after me, and found out where I was by going to my people in London. He detested the eternal grooming of horses, but liked gunnery. My pals were introduced, and we repaired to the canteen, to which the driver was admitted on condition he was strictly rationed, for we had to get home in safety.

We all spent the time bally-ragging. Sampson poured a pint of good beer over Greenling's head and got his face

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sat on for his pains. Lamont took a flying tackle at the barman who was collecting glasses, and brought him down in great style with a laden tray. I squared the damage and the incident was regarded as closed until we started chanting the song we had learnt at Stamner, and which finished with the words:

"Ach! ach! mein Gott!  
What a bloody rotten lot  
Are the boys of the R.F.A."

Although they sang it themselves they objected to hearing it from the lips of common gravel-crushers and attacked us in a body. We kept our end up very well, thanks mainly to Stephens, who grabbed one of our assailants by the legs, swung him round in a circle, and knocked half a dozen foes off their feet with his human weapon. Shorrocks and Jones became detached from the main body, and suffered severely until a truce was called. On our explaining that no offence was intended, we buried the hatchet, and resumed our carousal, singing a song with about twenty verses concerning a young lady from Armentières.

A countryman came in selling eggs and I bought all he had, a big basketful, and we indulged in playful tricks like shoving them in each others' faces until Stephens took on a bet that he would swallow a dozen with the shells, and did it, chewing each one thoroughly, and never felt any the worse for the experience as far as I know. Greenling was trying to persuade a gunner that eggs cannot be broken by pressing them longways in the hands. The other fellow kept on smashing them to prove that Greenling was wrong, and when he had finished his legs were covered with yolks.

On the way home Sampson fell out of the cab, and when we picked him up was lying on his back, looking up at the sky, and reciting

"Mica, mica parva stella!  
Miror quatenus sis, tam bella!  
Splendens eminens in illo,  
Alba velut gemma, caelo."

I had the use of a bicycle, and was able to see a good deal of the countryside, which was delightful after the

hubbub of barrack life. The air was fresh and clean, birds twittered in the hedgerows, and wisps of smoke curled skywards from the cottages nestling together at the foot of a hill. Just beyond the village was a hill crowned with pines, and there I loved to sit and watch the plain stretching from my feet into the dim distance. Farm labourers wended their weary way round the hill to the cottages where the evening meal awaited them, and where they would forget the toil of the day. All was so peaceful and idyllic that it was hard to realize that across the water millions of men, some from that very village, were lying in holes murdering each other.

At certain moments I felt intense pity for the peace-loving men in all countries who were shooting each other in the mud, crawling about in holes under bursting shells, leaving their mangled bodies in No Man's Land. The poor fools who at the behest of kings and emperors, backed up by a servile press, had scrambled into lorries on which were chalked, *A Berlin* or *Nach Paris* were more to be pitied than blamed for leaving all they held dear, to go and rot like dogs, in such numbers that their rotting corpses polluted the air and befouled the springs of the earth. Those of us who detest war are accused of ignoring the valour and self-abnegation, the magnificent tenacity and self-immolation of the men who fought; we are accused of besmirching the fair name of heroes; and so on. How could one who has fought with such men ever belittle their superhuman bravery and transcending fortitude, dogged tenacity and sterling spunk, when their bodies were racked and torn by the most fiendish instruments of destruction the world has ever seen, when I saw them lying sorely wounded in water-logged shell holes with their life-blood staining the mud a dull red?

Again I wondered how long the war would last, and whether I would ever be able to return to books after the chaotic existence I was leading. In barracks one had no time or desire for introspection, but out under the stars with a gentle breeze sighing in the branches, the murmur of a brook behind the hedge, the hooting of owls in the deep recesses of the plantation in which Druids had worshipped,

and which was still haunted by Dryads, there one felt an irresistible urge to indulge in mental and moral stocktaking. Always at night I experienced a holy awe among trees where the moonlight fell in silvery threads through the branches, throwing pools of soft light on the path and accentuating the gloomy recesses full of mystery and pleasing terror. I thought of my mother with utter sadness and felt it would have been an ineffable relief to weep, but that was, I knew, a physical impossibility. I had been dissatisfied with my state before enlistment, dreaming of the freedom I imagined existed in the army. My dreams were in process of demolition, and I was awakening to the fact that my chains were heavier than I had ever borne before.

On my way home I met a girl walking alone along a quiet lane. She was tall with an athletic figure, and, as I drew near, she glanced in my direction, and picked up my hat that a gust of wind had just blown off. I went back, dismounted, and thanked her with some confusion, for she was an extremely pretty girl, with a fine ruddy complexion that denoted good health and an open-air life. She was hatless, and her fair hair was thick and wavy; she had oval features, blue eyes, and a small roguish mouth with soft red lips.

"Do you mind if I walk with you?" I inquired rather diffidently. I had grown amazingly bold with women, but there was something so austere and proud about this girl that I expected to be snubbed.

"Why should you want to walk with an absolute stranger?" she asked, with a smile, that lit up her face in a strangely fascinating way.

"For two reasons, mainly. The first is that you are extremely attractive, and the second that I am a stranger in this part of the country and know no one outside the barracks."

"You know how to flatter, at any rate," she replied with a laugh that showed her to appreciate the tribute to her beauty.

"True praise is the sincerest form of flattery, and your mirror tells you every day that you are beautiful. That you cannot deny, can you?"

"You probably say the same thing to every woman you meet, you cannot deny that, can you?"

"Most certainly. I could no more tell an ugly woman



she was pretty than I could praise the gait of a flat-footed person. Besides, it would be folly to praise the face of an ugly woman. She would feel nothing but contempt for such clumsy and hypocritical praise. But tell her she has a sparkling wit, a delightful carriage, a charming manner, and that her features denote a generous nature with artistic tastes; she will be captivated and praise your discernment."

"Well, I would rather be plain than pretty, for beauty is a dangerous gift."

"Not when accompanied by judgment and sound common sense."

"Flattery again."

"No, only a merited tribute. A merely pretty girl lacking brains may impress fools, but fails completely to captivate the heart of a thinking man. Her stupid conversation, insipid manner, and caprices, cure any heart-sickness at a very early stage. Just imagine the deception a thinking man endures when, having married an empty-headed doll, he craves for the companionship that is denied him, and when his wife's looks have faded he feels he has been cheated, and seeks elsewhere that intimate friendship with a woman that is as necessary to a man as bread and meat."

"Do you believe in Platonic friendship?"

"I believe such a relationship is possible, but rare, unless among those whose passions have ceased to trouble them."

"What do you think of love at first sight?"

"I don't think I am qualified to express an opinion on such a topic, but it seems to me that what we usually term love at first sight is infatuation pure and simple. The difficulty appears to be that love is so inextricably bound up with sex, that most young people who think they are deeply in love are simply fired with an irresistible impulse to commit the sexual act."

We reached a house standing back from the road and covered with ivy. My companion stopped at the gate and fingered the latch, evidently undecided whether to leave me brusquely or prolong the conversation.

"I really must go in now, it's getting late."

"It's quite early and the walk has been so delightful that I would give anything to continue it."

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"But I promised to return at eight and it's five minutes to, now."

"Could you not possibly come out again?"

"Well, I suppose I could if I wanted to, but why should I?"

"Simply because your company gives me the keenest pleasure and I would love to know you better. Also I think we have a good deal in common."

"Very well. I'll meet you in about a quarter of an hour, if you really don't mind waiting. I'm on my own at present, for my father is in London, and he's the only near relative I have."

I waited, full of pleasurable anticipation, and the twenty minutes that elapsed before Jean reappeared seemed so many seconds. We walked away down the lane after I had concealed my bicycle in the shrubbery behind the gate. When we came to a stile I took Jean's hand to help her over, and retained it as we continued our stroll across a field through which ran a narrow path. Some cattle were grazing in a meadow, and, to my surprise, my companion gripped my arm, whispering that she was in a blue funk whenever she saw a bull.

"Surely you are not afraid of animals, living as you are in the country and seeing them every day?"

"I'm city born and bred. We only came here a week ago on account of father's nerves. He fears air-raids but has to spend a lot of his time in London, that is why I'm all alone and also why I dawdled so much with you this evening."

I put my arm round her waist without resistance, and we sat on a gate watching a lamp twinkling on a distant hill. Signallers were at work and I spelt out the messages, which were banal enough, but tremendously interesting to a girl who had never heard of the Morse code. I wanted to kiss her, but for a long time hesitated, resolving that I would make the attempt after counting ten, then twenty, and so on. It was only when the moon disappeared behind a big black cloud, and we were in complete darkness, that I drew the upturned lips to mine and pressed them with unmitigated joy. Our perch was rather insecure and we left it to

seek a better one, which we found at the foot of an old oak, under which was a mossy bank. I spread out my coat and in a few minutes we were lying locked in a close embrace. We kissed and kissed again, until our lips seemed merged into one. It seemed to me we had been lying there but a few seconds when a church clock chimed twelve. Jean was silent as we retraced our steps, then said suddenly :

"I wish I were a man."

"Whatever for?"

"Because a man gets so much more out of life."

We tarried long at the door, where I renewed my protestations of love and eternal devotion. We were kissing still when the village clock chimed one.

"If my pater knew there would be a terrible row. I really must go."

"When may I see you again?"

"I don't even know your name, and Mother Grundy would have a dozen fits if she knew how we met."

I told her my name, and pleaded so eloquently, that at length she consented to meet me on the following Saturday evening, when she hoped to introduce me to her father. I reached barracks at three o'clock in the morning, and was so thrilled by the adventure that I was smoking in bed when the bugles sounded *réveillé*. Since leaving Jean I had been consumed by the fever of desire, which was so powerful that sleep was impossible.

In a pub that evening we were excited by rumours of our impending departure for the front. Flushed faces and bright eyes revealed the repressed emotion, and reckless horse-play waxed fast and furious. We stood on chairs, chanting a song Sampson taught us and which ran as follows :

"To drink is a Christian diversion,  
Unknown to the Turk or the Persian :  
Let Mahometan fools  
Live by heathenish rules,  
And be damned over tea-cups and coffee.  
But let British lads sing,  
Crown a health to the king,  
And to hell with your sultan and sophy."

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A little chap named Smith came in, and as soon as he was blind drunk we cut off his moustache, which was of the variety known as walrus, and stuffed it in his pocket in case he would like to keep it. He got as wild as hell when he realized what had been done and refused to listen to reason. He cooled down somewhat when we held Lamont, who had long curly hair, and allowed him to hack it off with the same instrument that had severed his moustache, namely a jack-knife. Lamont wore his hair very short at the back of the neck in accordance with regulations, but stubbornly refused to part with any on top, probably because it seemed too beautiful to part with. I thought he was going mad when Smith hacked away with the sharp knife, and his language was so profane that we had to shut the door, as the navvies in the next room were complaining.

Next evening a gentle rain started to fall when I was returning to barracks and as I followed an old winding lane the sweet sad notes of "last post" rang out clearly over the countryside. I felt sad and had a strange premonition that I would not survive the war. As I cycled slowly back I longed to go, like Arthur, to some mysterious Avalon where I might find healing for my grievous wounds. Arthur's were physical, mine were moral and spiritual. I had been reading some poems of that gorgeous poet, Christina Rossetti, and some verses from "Up-Hill" kept running through my mind :

" Shall I find comfort, travel-sore and weak ?  
Of labour you shall find the sum.  
Will there be beds, for me and all who seek ?  
Yea, beds for all who come."

## CHAPTER VIII

A FEW of the men, suspecting that our days in England were numbered, slipped off home to London. They obtained week-end passes, and remained at home until the police arrested them. Most of them were good soldiers and did not intend to desert ; they simply wanted a little liberty before going out to war.

A message came from the London police informing the C.O. that six of the lost sheep had been apprehended, and were kicking their heels in various police-stations. The company was out for the day when the message came, and the orderly sergeant asked me if I would care to undertake the job of bringing the delinquents back. I thought it would be a good idea as I might wangle a few hours in London, so found six men to act as escorts, and caught the next train.

Two of the prisoners were brothers and were in Liverpool Street police-station. Another fellow was at Hoxton, the fourth at Canning Town, the fifth at Limehouse, and the sixth at Shoreditch. The sergeant at Liverpool Street granted me permission to lodge all the prisoners there for a few hours, so that my companions and I could slip off home for a flying visit. The Canning Town bird came quietly, explaining that he was satisfied with the few extra days he had had with his young wife ; but trouble was in store for us at Hoxton. A young woman was sitting on the steps of the police-station, and cried out in a shrill voice that we were not going to take her husband. When he was handed over and I signed for him the fun started. The girl-wife kicked, scratched, and fought like fury, to rescue her spouse. She could not have been more than seventeen and her lamentations attracted a crowd of sympathizers of both sexes. A blow from a bottle sent me flying and I had to handcuff the prisoner to one of my men for safety. A

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well-dressed young lady in a car came to our assistance, and I asked her to telephone from a shop for the police. She rushed away to do so, and in a few minutes four constables came running round the corner. They dispersed the crowd with hefty blows, and arrested the young wife together with three ringleaders. I felt sorry for the wife, for she was only a child, and overwrought at the thought of losing her husband. They had been married but a few weeks.

The Limehouse scamp was an artful dodger and begged me not to handcuff him. I told him I would not put the darbies on him if he would give his word not to try to escape. He swore by all the saints in heaven he would come quietly, and was allowed to walk freely. In the middle of a busy thoroughfare he suddenly took to his heels and went like a hare through the groups of pedestrians. We gave chase but soon lost sight of our quarry. It was a poor district, and escorts were not viewed with a friendly eye. No attempt was made to stop the escaping prisoner, but the pursuers were hampered as much as possible. I have often wondered if I would try to stop a man running away from the police. My sporting instincts would prompt me to let the poor devil have a run for his money. All the odds are against him, and if he can outwit his hunters good luck to him.

I had the addresses of the prisoners, and Clarke, the fugitive, lived near the scene of his dash for liberty. Finding his abode I posted a man at the back, and knocked at the front door, which was opened by a bedraggled hussy who protested that her husband was not at home. Her vehemence convinced me, and I was about to withdraw, when a creaking sound was audible upstairs which gave the lie to her assertion that she was alone in the house.

"Either Private Clarke comes down or I search the house," I exclaimed in my sternest manner (which was probably not as impressive as I imagined).

"I swear to God 'e ain't 'ere an' if yer don't muck off I'll scratch yer bloody eyes aht," shrieked the virago.

"Clarke," I yelled up the stairs, "better come down at once and save trouble, or I'll have to send one of my men for the police and a search warrant, and that will mean more trouble for you."

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Private Clarke, with his thin ferret-like face, and furtive gait, opened the door of the solitary bedroom, and slinked down the dilapidated staircase on which hung tattered strips of American cloth. I was about to put the bracelets on him when he begged to be allowed to say good-bye to his wife in the parlour. This time I was taking no chances and examined the room to make sure there were no holes beyond those filled by the door and window.

The room was in semi-darkness and a musty smell hung about it. The carpet was threadbare, the paper on the walls soiled and torn, the furniture in the last stages of decrepitude, and a dismal looking evergreen, dusty and forlorn, wilted in a cracked pot before the window, of which one pane was shattered and the aperture stuffed with rags. I posted one man outside the door, and another near the window, before allowing the couple to pull down the blind and turn the key in the lock. They remained closeted for twenty minutes and then came out looking dishevelled but happy.

It was late in the evening when we returned from Shore-ditch escorted by two policemen, for it was an evil-looking neighbourhood. The men were somewhat disappointed at not getting home, but understood that it was impossible under the circumstances. I was relieved when we secured two compartments in the Aldershot train, and I settled down in a corner to a cigarette and the evening paper. Just as the train was starting, there was a commotion in the next compartment, and I rushed in to find that the elusive Clarke had given us the slip again. His wrists and hands were very small, and he had been able to withdraw the imprisoned one from the steel cuff, and dive out of the open doorway, before any one realized what was afoot. After a second's hesitation I decided not to give chase. The fugitive was a bad soldier, always in trouble, and a damned nuisance to the company. I felt tolerably sure that the C.O. would be glad to see the last of him. Next day there was an informal inquiry, and my men and I were exonerated, and the police informed that Clarke was once more at liberty. As far as I know he was never recaptured.

I had never visited a night-club and welcomed the sugges-

tion of Greenling and Sampson that we should do so without delay. Jean's father had taken her off to Scotland, and there seemed no prospect of an early meeting, so I was once more a free-lance, especially as the pater had intimated that he disapproved of our liaison, as he termed it. Sampson had a secret hoard that he had saved in view of an eventual holiday. Several hours' coaching per week brought in a welcome addition to his salary, and he carefully hid it from his grasping spouse, hoping that some day he would have a glorious burst. Never having been out alone until he joined up, his education had been sadly neglected. I was still in funds and Greenling seemed to be well supplied with rhino. Fortune served us and we were able to secure week-end passes to London.

In order to be free from the attentions of military police we hired evening dress in a small tailor's shop that appeared to specialize in such transactions, and sauntered along to the West End, where we found a restaurant to our liking, and ordered a dinner that would have been good at any time, but was incomparable after army fare. The wines were chosen with fastidious discrimination and we did them justice. Sampson was the first to wax eloquent and required a little restraint, for we had no desire to land up in quod.

"To think," he mused, "that less than six months ago I lived in terror of a woman! I was a poor down-trodden worm, a miserable pedagogue, walking and yet getting nowhere, like a convict on a treadmill, never daring to smoke, drink, or go out alone. Allowed two shillings a week pocket-money and treated like a drudge. But now, what a contrast! I have learnt to be less pusillanimous, more virile; am I not a soldier, a gallant defender of civilization, making the world safe for democracy? I despise those who tried to destroy my soul, including the headmaster with the mind of an owl to whom I had to say 'Sir' ump-teen times a day, and the brats I crammed for examinations who would lie, cheat, and steal, for the sake of an extra mark. Verily *tempora mutantur, nos et mutamur in illis!*"

He had had enough, for as soon as he started spouting Latin he needed watching, so we put him on the water-cart



for the remainder of the meal. Greenling suggested getting a move on, and wanted to go in search of a suitable club. I pointed out the waste of time such procedure would involve, and we decided to take a taxi and ask the driver to help us.

The driver we hailed knew of the very place, not too select but not too sordid. It was in a side street near Piccadilly, and we were scrutinized by the door-keeper, who appeared satisfied, and allowed us to enter after a little questioning. Going upstairs we entered a large, brilliantly lit room, where a nigger band was in full blast, and several couples were dancing. Others were sitting at small tables sipping champagne. We ordered a bottle and were soon joined by two smartly-dressed women who spoke in cultured accents and were, judging by their make-up, ornaments of the *demi-monde*. I was rather more finical in amorous adventures than my pals, and made no effort to enter into conversation with the new-comers. They invited my companions to dance, and the invitation was accepted on my assuring them that I was fixed up. I had my eye on a girl sitting alone in the opposite corner, and when she looked at me I smiled and she did not turn her head away. Encouraged by her glance I went over and sat beside her.

"How is it you are all alone?" I queried.

"Why should I not be?" she parried, toying with her glass and looking rather wistful.

"Well, it isn't usual for an attractive young lady to be unescorted," I murmured, trying hard to control my tongue that had a habit of wandering when I was fuddled.

"How much drink have you had?" she asked with a smile.

"More than is good for me, I'm afraid."

"How did you find this place?"

"A taxi-driver brought us here."

"Have you ever been to a night-club before?"

I had to admit it was my first experience of such places.

"How old are you?" was her next question.

I tried to bluff but had to admit that I was not nineteen. My companion told me to call her Daphne and I did so with alacrity. She was tiny and dark, with a slender figure,

and a face that would have delighted an artist. Her comments on life were couched in aphorisms worthy of being treasured and I wondered if they were original. The band struck up and we danced. Her body pressed closely against me and a rare perfume rose from her head. She was lissom and danced with ease and grace, while I held her so closely that I felt her in every ripple of her flexible body and limbs.

At the end of the dance we went to a small alcove and smoked in silence. Daphne placed her feet on a balcony rail in front and pulled back her skirt to avoid creasing it at the knee. The fine silk stockings emphasized the slender ankles and shapely calves. I kissed her while caressing the firm little breasts which stood out challengingly, instead of drooping like the flaccid apologies one sees on so many anæmic maidens, who starve their bodies to keep them slim, and sacrifice their health in the process. After a few dances and a little wine I suggested a drive and we went out. The cold night air was delightfully refreshing after the heated close atmosphere of the club, and I drank in big gulps to clear my head. We drove out west, past Hyde Park, and told the driver to make for Wimbledon Common. He waited while we went for a walk. It was frosty with a clear moon, and we walked sharply to keep warm. As we returned to the cab Daphne suggested going to her flat, and I needed no second bidding. Sampson and Greenling were still dancing, and I arranged to meet them next day. On the way to the flat I once again fell to wondering if my companion were a common prostitute, and weighed up the pros and cons. We had met in a place with a dubious reputation and she had pressed her body against mine in such a manner as to excite in me the highest pitch of desire. On the other hand she was extremely refined and must have been well educated.

So the point was still undecided when we stopped outside her abode. It was in Chelsea in a quiet avenue, and most tastefully decorated. On the mantelshelf was the picture of an officer in the uniform of the Scots Guards. He looked about thirty-six and was rather handsome.

"Is this your husband?" I asked, turning to Daphne.

"Yes," she answered in a low voice, "but he's dead."

"Killed in the war?"

"Yes, he lost both legs at Le Cateau, and shot himself rather than live the life of a *cul-de-jatte*."

"Why did you go to the club alone? Surely it is dangerous for a girl to frequent such places unescorted?"

"I hadn't been there before. I usually go to the Carlton, but to-night I was alone and couldn't go there, so asked the taxi man to take me to some place where an escort would not be necessary. It was the same man that you had. I had been married only three months when my husband went to the front, and I never saw him again. I must have life, gaiety, wine and love. So far I have had no pension owing to the strange manner of my husband's death, although I hope to get something eventually."

Daphne could not have been more than twenty, and I felt intense compassion for her, hating to think that she might finish up like Emma Bovary, although that was the fate of so many such girls.

"It isn't really dangerous," she explained. "I can tell rouds at a glance and avoid them. There are plenty of young officers, mostly public-schoolboys, at these clubs, and for many their days are numbered. I don't think it wrong to bring some joy into their lives before they return to the hell over there."

She ran her fingers through my hair and exclaimed petulantly: "It isn't right that such young boys should be sent out to be killed while the rotters stay at home."

"Ruskin says in one of his books that war is the great gentleman's game, which ladies like them best to play at," I replied with a smile.

"It is true, and I am ashamed of my sex when I see women so heartless as to send their lovers to their deaths without a tear, although I suppose that when war is declared they have to go."

Daphne went to the piano and accompanied herself while she sang some haunting melodies, which I think were sea songs of the Hebrides. Then she came and we arranged cushions on a divan in front of the gas fire, and nestled down among them.

I left at noon after promising to meet Daphne and take

her out to dinner. My pals were at the rendezvous and we went and had lunch.

We played billiards in the afternoon, then called on a friend of Greenling's who kept a pub at Golders Green. My two companions were soon half-seas-over, but I had sense enough to keep sober in view of my appointment with Daphne. The landlord told some funny stories about the celebrities who lived in the district, while his wife kept chipping in with: "No George, 'e didn't seduce 'er in the passage, it was in the scullery," or, "No dear, that wasn't the girl 'e put in the family way, it was Sally; Nellie is respectable and never 'ad 'er kid until nine months to the day after 'er weddin'."

I left at six, after again arranging to meet my pals at noon next day, and arrived at the spot where Daphne had promised to be at seven. When I looked at my watch it was only half-past six and the half hour seemed interminable. After the hour had struck and she did not appear, I called myself a prize fool for ever thinking she intended to come. At ten past I had looked at my watch twenty times, and was cursing my folly in leaving the other two musketeers, when Daphne, flushed and radiant, stepped out of a taxi. From her fashionable and becoming toque to her dainty snake-skin shoes she was a dream of delight.

"Have you been waiting long, darling?" she purred with a flashing smile. "I'm so sorry to have kept you waiting, as I am a stickler for punctuality. However, I went to take tea with my mother-in-law and couldn't get away before a quarter to seven. She is a delightful old lady, and we get on well together, but it is extremely difficult to get away from her. Where shall we go, darling?"

We decided to go to a little place in Soho which was unspoiled in those days. It was a French restaurant, and the patron's cellar had delighted many a connoisseur. The little alcove in which we sat was curtained off, and we kissed between each course. The wine made Daphne extraordinarily animated and her fascination showed itself to the full. After dinner we danced for an hour and then went home. As soon as we were inside the sitting-room Daphne lit the gas fire, slipped into her bedroom, and returned a

few minutes later clad in silk pyjamas of a beautiful light blue shade.

When I awoke at nine Daphne was splashing in her bath. We breakfasted and talked over a cigarette.

"What are your plans for the future?" asked Daphne, lighting another of her Turkish brand, the only kind she smoked.

"I have none, really. The military authorities will formulate them for me. If I come through safely, which is most improbable, I hope to go to Oxford in due course. Much water will flow under the bridge before that happens, I'm afraid."

Daphne had spent three years at Newnham and showed me her name on the roll of old students.

"I read for Honours in Philosophy of all things, and came away with my head in a maze, for when all is said and done we don't know the millionth part of anything, ultimate truth eludes us completely, our senses imprison us, and because our feeble brains work in a certain way, we foolishly imagine it to be the only way or the best way. We are about as important as bacteria in this sorry scheme of things. When the last traces of humanity will have disappeared from the earth, it will be as if man had never existed."

"So you believe with Sophocles that 'sweetest is the life untroubled with thought'?"

"Undoubtedly," she replied; "as Theognis puts it, 'vain are our thoughts and our knowledge is nothing. The gods direct all things according to their will,' that is, we are controlled by inexorable fate, destiny, call it what you will. Swift was right when he termed the Yahoo the most detestable of all animals and the most depraved. When a Yahoo gets a great store of the precious substance he spends his life seeking, he can buy whatever he has a mind to, and have his choice of the most beautiful females."

"I never would have thought you were such a misanthrope," I laughed.

"It isn't so much misanthropy as a hatred of shams. We English are the most perfect hypocrites under the sun. A friend of mine was expelled from college because she said

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she was an atheist. As Shelley said, atheism looks a terrific monster at a distance, but loses its terrors when examined closely. We have twisted the word virtue until it stands for that horrible self-mutilation that is the negation of the Italian *virtù*, which means power, efficacy."

"Don't you find such a philosophy of life rather depressing?"

"Not really. Most of us are not strong enough to face facts, and take refuge in religious dope, which dulls the inquiring mind, and makes one believe that all is for the best in the best of worlds. Yesterday a well-known city man put an end to his life, and the coroner said his mind must have given way, or he would never have done such a cowardly thing. It seems to me that such courage is required to take one's life that few of us are capable of it."

"It is a difficult problem," I interposed, "for so much seems to depend on one's religious convictions or lack of them. An orthodox Christian believes we are in this vale of tears to bear our cross and be purified, just as gold is refined in the fire. Therefore such a person must stick it in spite of sickness, poverty, and any other blows that Fate may deal him. But a man who doubts the possibility of a future life, and is prepared to take the plunge, seems to me brave because he leaps into the unknown."

Daphne was a curious mixture of hedonism and determinism, believing the raptures and roses of vice to be infinitely preferable to the lilies and languors of virtue, and that "eat, drink and be merry for to-morrow we die," is an honest dictum. She opened her sensitive heart to love and made it her god. To her it was a sacred thing with its incense and ritual. The partner chosen to commune with her had to abandon himself completely with ecstasy, to believe with her that the passionate union of two quivering bodies elevated and ennobled them.

"I spent the last two nights with you because I liked you," she said, "and it is ten days since my lover went to the front, and to-morrow I am going away into the country for a quiet holiday. I have a tiny cottage down in Devon and whenever I need a rest and change I go there for a week or more. There is something in the woods and hills, the sea

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and the clean fresh air that comes over it, the simple folk and their charming hospitality, that never fails to attract. When restless or despondent I walk away over the heath and sit watching the sails, the gulls that sweep by, the magic of the sky: all Nature's gorgeous panorama intoxicates me as the song of the nightingale overwhelmed Keats with pure ecstasy."

"Were you brought up in a Christian home?" I wondered.

"Why do you ask?"

"Merely to know if your emancipation from the servile thralldom that masquerades as Christianity was similar to my own."

"My father is a famous parson," she replied with a smile. "He can drown his audience in such a flood of words that when he stops, perspiring and triumphant, they come back to earth with a delightful sensation of having been wafted to ethereal realms just under the floor-boards of heaven. Until the war he was the incumbent of a fashionable West End church and they often had to put benches in the aisle, so great was the crowd. He never told the rich scoundrels that there was anything wrong with their lives or that they should try to carry out the Sermon on the Mount, he simply pandered to them and, of course, was very popular. Now he is a chaplain in the army, and goes round with the fiery cross, spouting in the base camps that the war is a holy crusade."

Daphne took down a volume of Swinburne and read several poems with intense feeling and a beautifully clear enunciation. "I love Swinburne for his rebelliousness and because he was swayed by his passions and wonderful imagination. Also because he had nothing mean about him, and fought for the freedom of individuals and nations. The poem addressed to Mazzini to celebrate the freedom of Italy, secured after such struggles and bloodshed, is a gorgeous thing. Critics have reviled him for standing too much apart from the struggles of humanity with their hopes and fears. The herd-instinct is susceptible, you see, and you hurt it at your peril. He is always called a pessimist, as if anybody could look out on life with its utter stupidity,

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futility, and wanton cruelty, without being a pessimist? 'And God saw everything that he had made and it was very good.' I wonder if the cattle in the tropics think so when they are devoured by ticks, or man when bitten by a snake, or driven nearly crazy by mosquitoes, or when locusts come and destroy all his crops? A friend of mine who lived in South Africa told me a delightful story of an old Boer who would not use locust poison, because they were God's creatures, and Noah must have had two in the Ark, and so on. When the swarm got really bad the old man let all the water from his dam run round his garden to protect his vegetables. You must remember, to appreciate the sacrifice, that in that country it is not unusual to have the most devastating droughts. Well, the locusts swam or made walls with their bodies and got across the water. Then the ancient Africander sent his native boys into the house for all the bedclothes, to protect the precious produce. It was useless, the pests ate large holes in the blankets, and devoured the green stuff. Then the farmer consented to use poison, firmly convinced that he was killing God's creatures."

I felt such ardent sympathy for Daphne that I would willingly have married her there and then, had it been possible. To offer her money would have made the whole affair sordid, but sitting near her I took her in my arms and said:

"Can I do anything for you?"

"Yes, think tenderly of the wonderful hours we have spent together."

"Are you in need of any money?"

"No, a wealthy aunt left me enough to live on, so I need not worry as far as money is concerned."

"Well, will you promise me something?"

"If it is possible."

"To take my address and let me know if ever I can be of any service to you."

"With pleasure. We shall remain good friends, and if ever circumstances throw us together again let us hope we shall still be able to enjoy the raptures of passionate love."



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She had no regrets and laughingly offered me a pair of silk knickers as a talisman. I thought she was joking but took them when she insisted. "When you return to England I promise you that I will come to you wherever you may be if you want me," whispered Daphne, and I went away trying hard to be cheerful, but utterly sad.

I was shamefully late at the rendezvous, and my pals noticed my preoccupied air, but refrained from commenting on it.

We got back to barracks in the evening and were immediately placed under arrest. Next day we were marched in front of the C.O., and, as I could offer no satisfactory explanation for overstaying my leave, was asked whether I would have a court-martial or revert to the ranks. I chose the latter course although I was well aware that I could have got off by pleading illness, as Captain Macdonald was most considerate. However, I was tired of the staff job and anxious to proceed overseas with my pals, so made no effort to plead extenuating circumstances.

Once more I was a private in the section, and they duly celebrated the prodigal's return. The rumour went round that we were going abroad at the end of the week. Once again we were going to India, Egypt, and even Gibraltar. A little sun-blind to protect the neck made us think we were bound for a hot country. However, the C.O.'s batman told me in confidence that we were booked for France at the end of the week and were to sail from Southampton. We were given pamphlets, signed by Kitchener, in which we were exhorted to do all in our power to uphold the honour of Britain, and to beware of wine and women. The last injunction caused uproarious mirth and many facetious comments.

I needed a pair of boots and went to the stores, where Jackson called me a bloody fool for chucking in my stripes. "By God, Saint-Mandé, you'll be hellish sorry out there when the dirt starts to fly. With me you could have stayed behind most of the time. It's asking for your quietus, chucking up a good job that many fellows would give a couple of fingers for."

"I suppose I am a damn fool, but being in the war I'm

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going over the top with my pals, come what may. If I didn't I should feel I was dodging it, and letting others do my share. Why should I shirk it when men twice my age will be in the front line?"

"I know how you feel, but we'll all have our chance before it's over, and it seems to me all bunk to think it better to kill off the young fellows first. The race will need them more than the others when the killing is finished."

We talked on, while searching for a pair of boots to fit me, and discovered that there were no nines, so I took what were called big eights, hoping they would stretch. We were paid that afternoon, most of us receiving a pound, which was more than usual as we were in credit, and nobody knew when the next pay-day would be. I decided to keep some gold in a belt under my shirt, so drew fifty pounds from the bank.

We had a grand celebration at night and almost all got blind drunk, heedless of the fact that we were to parade at five in the morning. The canteen ran with beer, the piano was banged until it gave up the ghost, and we sang choruses until our voices became too hoarse for further bellowing. Here and there, in barrack-rooms or huts erected by religious bodies, were men, either isolated or in small groups, looking anxious and down-in-the-mouth. They were for the most part married men with wives and children at home. It must have been infinitely harder for such men than for the irresponsible youngsters who regarded the whole affair as a monstrous joke. We had no one but our parents, and the idea of being blotted out didn't worry us unduly. Love of adventure throbbled in our veins and at last we were going to satisfy it. It must have been dreadful for the older ones thinking of leaving widows and orphans or returning crippled.

Among the youngsters there was the wildest hilarity. The long and arduous training was over, and the glorious uncertainty of the future intoxicated us. Each of us appeared to think that even if the others were killed we would come through with a string of medals. We bellowed "England, Home and Glory" and a number of patriotic music-hall ditties. "Last Post" was disregarded and

nothing happened. When we returned to our room at two o'clock in the morning, Lamont put his fists through all the remaining panes of glass, and my pals lay down without undressing, in a drunken stupor. I kept sober enough to finish packing, and even attempted to write a few letters, but my hand trembled too much, and I had to abandon my efforts in that direction. It was not fear or excitement, for I was quite calm and did not know what fear was. The booze had gone to my head, and although I could think clearly enough, my hands and feet would not obey as I tried to fasten a knot or step over a pile of kit. I examined my Browning and fifty rounds, which I kept in a belt and holster under my tunic. Sewn inside my tunic also was a tube of morphia tablets, for I was determined, if severely wounded, to put an end to it. There were one or two minor alterations to be made to my last will and testament, but I had to leave that until the morrow.

Shorrocks came in fighting drunk with a couple of bottles of whisky. He awoke everybody to share the treat, and as further sleep was out of the question we spread out a blanket on the table and started to play banker. Squabbles were frequent and we played as if our lives depended on our winning a few shillings. I looked at my companions and reflected that some of us, probably most, would be killed or wounded in a few weeks or months, and yet they played as if they hadn't a care in the world, watching the turn of a card with bated breath, cursing when it was bad, laughing with delight when it meant raking in a copper or two. At four I had won all available cash, owing mainly to my reserves being greater than those of my pals. They didn't worry overmuch, for in our freemasonry nobody would want for a drink or a smoke as long as one member had anything. We were smoking and joking round the table when the vigorous bugle notes rang out, warning us to get ready for our last day in England. Many of my pals were utterly oblivious to the solemnity of the occasion, and perhaps it was better so. The job in hand would not be helped by dismal forebodings. When "Fall-In" sounded we tumbled down the stairs, leaving the room in the wildest disorder.

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The roll was called. After a good deal of palaver, and inspecting, the C.O. appeared satisfied, and in obedience to a sharp word of command the battalion swung out through the barrack gate for the last time. The band played "Colonel Bogey" and we stepped out with a fine rhythm, heads erect and "chucking a chest," as the men termed it. A few women, one or two in tears, stood near the gate waving to their husbands. They turned up again at the station. We entrained quickly, and before seven were on our way to Southampton. There we ran into the sheds at the docks and waited a couple of hours owing to some hitch. My pals and I lay down and slept on the cold stone floor, waking up stiff and with splitting headaches owing to the carousal of the night before.

In a pub I had a couple of drinks to clear my head, and bought a bottle for the section; it would be a drink each, at any rate, and welcome enough under the circumstances. I sent a few post cards to friends telling them the war would soon be over, as I was going out to put paid to Jerry's account. In the High Street a prostitute stopped me and promised me the ineffable delights of sexual bliss for the extremely modest sum of one pound, but I offered the damsel a drink which she gladly accepted. We went into an hotel near the station and had quite an interesting conversation. My companion said she was the wife of a sailor, and he had deserted his ship in some foreign port, so that his wife lost her allowance, and had apparently decided to make ends meet in more ways than one. She almost undressed in her pathetic eagerness to demonstrate the beauty of her body. To get rid of her I gave her a few shillings and instead of being grateful, she yelled after me, "'Fraid of me, aren't yer?"

Returning to the docks, I sat on a seat at the side of a grass plot, on which children were playing. It was two o'clock in the afternoon, and the sun was making a brave effort to penetrate the clouds. I sat down near a swell with white spats and a most staid manner, not because I wanted to be near him, but because the other seats were occupied by women and children. My mind passed in review the events of the last six months and the vicissitudes

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through which I had passed. In as far as I had lost all regard for conventions, either in word or deed, I did not regard it as a calamity, rather the reverse. Perhaps I was too depraved to realize my depravity. Morality is what society permits, and although my companions had none of the sanctimonious righteousness of the pillars of society, they were also free from meanness, perfidy, selfishness, and contemptible baseness of soul, that are the chief characteristics of those pillars. Their greatness, as Lona tells Bernick in Ibsen's play, is built on a treacherous morass of lies, hypocrisy, deceit, and cunning; together with a ferocious disregard for the welfare or happiness of those less fortunately situated. My rough companions would, almost to a man, give their last cigarette to another soldier who was without a smoke, and I felt that, uncouth as my comrades were, I had found comradeship, and had had the rare experience of seeing a large conglomerate rabble, mostly labouring men, whipped into shape, so that now they were smart, well-disciplined units, of a composite yet cohesive body. Most of the men believed in the justice of the cause for which they were going to fight and were, no doubt, to a large extent, victims of the bluff that was so generously dished out by politicians and a servile press. But the point was that those common labouring men were prepared to sacrifice all, even life and health, for what they believed to be right. I wondered just how much we were being bluffed, and whether any of the stories of German atrocities were true. I could not believe them to be such unmitigated rotters as they were painted in the newspapers.

My only quarrel with Germany was that she refused the suggestion of Sir Edward Grey for a conference of ambassadors, that might well have avoided all conflict. That was her crime, in my view. But the peoples had practically no say in the matter. Mob psychology is a curious branch of study and has shown how easy it is to stir up the hellish passions lying dormant in our hearts, so that a group will commit acts that the individual would never stoop to. The plebs is like a sleeping tiger. Woe to those who stir the masses to fury with its fratricidal slaughter on a colossal scale. Why should we be heroes for killing men over the

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water, when murder within the national boundaries is regarded as such a horrible crime that the culprit must, if caught, forfeit his own life? It is depressing to read the history of Europe with its constant wars, after each of which new treaties and alliances are made, in which there is no question of anything but grab, in spite of fine words and highfalutin phrases. It is the Yahoos fighting over the carcass.

A few days before we sailed a lady in a Y.M.C.A. hut asked me if it was true that the Germans were eating babies. I gravely replied that it was so, and that they were digging up corpses and putting them in cold storage against famine.

The swell-dressed man, obviously over military age, turned to me and offered me a cigar, which I refused, for I felt he was doing it as an act of charity.

"Been to the front yet?" he inquired haughtily.

"No."

"Do you expect to go soon?"

"Yes, to-night."

"My word, I do envy you, indeed I do. If I were thirty years younger I would have made the Hun sit up and take notice; by gad I would. I can imagine you lucky blighters straining at the leash until your pig-stickers are tickling the Hun's gizzard. No nonsense when he shouts 'Kamerad!' run him through just the same. We must exterminate them before the world will be safe for civilization."

"Shut up, for Christ's sake," I retorted savagely; "you make me ashamed to think we are compatriots, you miserable skunk."

He glared and I strode away towards the ship, thinking of the men who were lying in the mud and blood without rancour, while elderly non-combatants frothed at the mouth with vituperations against the foe. I felt just as determined as ever to see the thing through and believed the Allies, although by no means guiltless, had more justice on their side than the enemy. In spite of that I saw red every time elderly loungers in their club, over a whisky and cigar, talked about fighting to the bitter end, until the Huns would be on their knees and gasping. I thought

conscientious objectors wrong and yet admired their moral courage, when they were sincere, for refusing to be intimidated into killing. The trouble was that all the conchies I knew were cranks and skunks who refused to help the nation in any shape or form. Their motive force was not idealism, but fear of getting their hides punctured.

The ship was packed on both decks, and there was great excitement, for many of the men had never been on the sea before, some had never even seen it! At ten o'clock we steamed out, while the relatives of officers and men cheered on the quay. The troops gave terrific cheers in return and then struck up "Homeland, when shall I see thee again?"

I stood apart and wondered how many of us would get back. I wondered grimly who would be the first to go, and so on. We were a happy crowd, seemingly quite oblivious of the fact that the old reaper was sharpening his sickle, and would soon be busy among us. Most of the men started gambling, and movement was difficult, for they sprawled all over the decks.

After passing the Isle of Wight the ship started to pitch and roll abominably, the wind freshened, and we saw we were in for a storm. Many of my companions were sick, and some lay groaning on the deck. Others rushed to the wrong side and the wind blew the vomit all over innocent bystanders. The storm increased in violence, and I could see nothing but the heaving waves with flying foam, and the dark sinister-looking outlines of two destroyers that were escorting us. We were wearing life-belts and no lights were shown, even smoking was forbidden except under cover.

I scrambled and climbed over obstructions until I found myself near one of the look-out men up on the bow. We stared over the angry heaving waste while waves broke right over the deck. The sailor was explaining that they hadn't enough ballast and that was why the vessel was behaving like a cork, when suddenly, a hurtling white streak, and a torpedo flashed across our bows. At the same instant a cluster of quick-firing guns on each destroyer came into action and rapped out an angry staccato. A few seconds later our guns blazed away at something in

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the darkness, and on the bridge a machine-gun rattled like hail on a tin roof. The racket was deafening while the escorting craft raced in zig-zags over a wide area at a terrific speed. I could see no submarine and doubted if anyone else could, for he probably submerged as soon as the projectile was fired.

While the din was at its height I took off my boots and coat so that, in case of need, I could swim better. There were not enough boats, and when a ship goes down suddenly most of them are put out of action, usually on account of the list. I had decided therefore to jump for it if our tub got one in a vital spot. It was all very exciting and fear was never thought of. I could not help admiring the submarine commander for his bravery in coming so close to get a good shot at us, in spite of the destroyers, ready and eager to send him and his crew to the bottom in a steel coffin.

Gradually the guns ceased firing and all became quiet save for the howling of the wind and the crashing of the waves over our decks. I felt desperately tired and sleepy, and realized that if I didn't lie down I would be sick. I reasoned that the lower parts of a ship must pitch and roll much less than the upper, so crept down to the engine-room where a Scots engineer was on duty. He appeared affable and after a little talk he told me he came from Perth. What memories that name evoked! We spoke of the beauty spots in and around the old city, and when I asked permission to lie down it was readily granted. The steel plates were hot and oily but some sacks under a bench made a comfortable kip. Needless to say, I fell asleep as soon as I lay down, being utterly exhausted. After what seemed but a few seconds I was roused by the clanging of the engine-room bell, the cries of men, and the stopping of the rhythmic clang of the engines. I felt wet and sticky, and, on inspecting my garments, found that a drum of thick oil had overturned in the night, and the ship's rolling had sent wave after wave under me, soaking me from shoulders to feet. However, I was not perturbed, as rain and mud would soon do worse, and perhaps the oil would prove a blessing in disguise and help to keep my clothes waterproof.



## CHAPTER IX

I CLIMBED up on deck and discovered that we were entering the port of Le Havre. It was six o'clock, the morning was cold and cheerless. Black clouds drifted across the sky and rain fell intermittently, and we felt anything but enthusiastic. The last night in Aldershot and the stormy crossing had taken most of the chirpiness out of us.

"Mucked up, fed up and far from bleedin' 'ome," muttered Shorrocks.

"Never mind, old son, we'll try and wangle a drink as soon as we get ashore," I said to cheer him up.

"Look at that bloke's trousers," cried Jones, pointing to a French territorial, "they're wider than my old woman's bloomers."

"How do you feel?" I asked Sampson, who looked ghastly.

"Absolutely b——d up," he replied with conviction.

He had been sick the whole way across and hadn't yet recovered.

Greenling stood alone wrapped in thought. He knew France well and the docks of Havre did not interest him particularly, yet he was staring intently over the town. Seeing Sampson and me he came over and recited with a grin:

"Once more unto the breach, dear friends, once more:  
For there is none of you so mean and base  
That hath not noble lustre in your eyes.  
I see you stand like greyhounds in the slips,  
Straining upon the start . . ."

"Straining my backside!" growled Sampson. "If I don't get some grub and a drink soon I'll drop like a pole-axed bull."

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I went down and was able to find the Scots engineer, with whom I bargained for a bottle of whisky, which I obtained at cost price upon swearing not to divulge where I got it from. For five shillings I got three damn good breakfasts from the ship's cook and rushed up to my pals with the good news. We found a quiet spot where we could feast unseen. Sampson's eyes shone with gratitude, and a good pull at the bottle put him right. We were as hungry as starving lions and cleaned up everything. At the end of the feed we shared what remained of the whisky, for it would perhaps be difficult to get a drink ashore and we might have a long march ahead.

"Do you know, Saint-Mandé, that grub and drink were the finest I've ever tasted. I feel a different man and fit to march all day if need be. What is my share in the bill?" asked Greenling, pulling out some money.

"What's the good of having pals if they can't help you occasionally?" I replied.

He gave me a look far more eloquent than words, and silently the three of us shook hands as a sign, if any were needed, that we were to stick together even unto death if necessary. Greenling was a curious fellow in many ways, so gentle and reserved that some of the men thought him soft, until a look at his big bony shoulders and angry eye (for when roused he looked positively fierce), discouraged them from taking any liberties. He was often taciturn and even sullen, or perhaps brooding would be a better word. At times he came out of his shell and indulged in the most hilarious gaiety and even horse-play, but his habitual mood was meditative. I liked the man immensely for his sincerity and honesty. At times he seemed to reach the most startling and unexpected conclusions by a method of reasoning that appeared logical but was not free from sophistry, yet even at such times I liked him, for he forced one to re-examine the basis of one's ideas and philosophy.

Greenling hated all humbug and the canting Yahoos who, under the guise of religion, have made the world a hateful and obscene place. As Aldous Huxley says, we are going down the Gadarene water-chute and the abyss

lies stinking below us. Greenling said the same thing in other words. As I watched him pour his share of the whisky into his water-bottle I felt that a good deal of his cynicism was due to shyness. No man was ever less of a hypocrite. He was cultured in the true sense of the word. There was no load of learned lumber in his head, but sound knowledge, wise judgment and infinite charm for all but bigots. He thought with Anatole France that irony and pity should guide one in one's dealings with fellow-men, and that the worst crimes were those against beauty.

We climbed on deck again, and the men were still standing and sitting, cursing the delay and absence of food. I had been to France several times, including a stay of a year at a French school, so was not as excited as the majority of the men who had never seen a French person or heard a word of the language. The most illiterate of my companions were the most arrogant and insular in their ideas. They thought the "Froggies" a poor degenerate lot, not realizing that every able-bodied man had been called to the colours in August, 1914, and that France was holding nine-tenths of the front while England prepared her armies and debated whether conscription would ever be needed. England took a long time to realize that she had to fight for her life, but when she did realize fully what the war meant she poured out blood and money like water, while the American Shylock supplied badly-made munitions at highest prices, and towards the end of the war came in to help save the Allies and the almighty dollar, since when the meek and modest inhabitants of God's own country have been telling the world in film and novel how they won the war. The thirty young American writers who in 1922 published a book called "Civilization in the United States" showed that there wasn't any, and Hendrik Van Loon was not wide of the mark when he described America as a polyglot boarding-house with the boarders in rebellion. Fortunately there are men like Sherwood Anderson, Sinclair Lewis, Dreiser, Mencken and others who are not hypnotized by the wealth and vulgar show that passes for culture in the States. America is the most splendid parvenu the world has ever seen.

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After a wait of four hours we straggled down the gangway and lined up on the quay. A few bedraggled women stood with shawls over their heads while ragged children held out their hands, crying, "Un penny, beeskweet, bully-beef," to which the kind-hearted Tommies responded sympathetically. We heard that we had a sixteen-kilometre march in front of us, and were given a tin of bully and two slices of bread each, which we ate while lounging about the quay. A few people watched us as we marched through the town, but most of them took no notice, the novelty of such scenes having apparently worn off to a great extent. The men whistled and sang from time to time and criticized everything with startling candour. Much amusement was provided by a shop which had in big letters over the window: "AUX 100,000 CHEMISES," for it is not quite proper to mention a woman's shirt in English, shifts being on the list of words that are taboo. Similarly a man's trousers is a perfectly respectable garment, but those of a female, whether we call them knickers, drawers, or bloomers, are highly indecent. When Shorrocks asked if the word chemise meant the same thing in French as in English, and I explained that in French it means simply a shirt, or chemise, according to whether the wearer were a male or female, and to the French it was quite proper to mention irrespective of the wearer's sex, he simply replied: "Who's bloody leg are yer tryin' ter pull?"

When we had left the town behind, the rain came down steadily and the *pavé* started to hurt our feet. My boots were too tight and caused my feet to swell. At the first halt I pulled off my socks and obtained temporary relief, but long before we reached camp my heels were badly chafed.

"'Ow much is a kilometre?" asked Shorrocks after we had covered about a third of the distance.

"Five-eighths of a mile."

"Well, 'ow many bleedin' miles are sixteen of the damn things?"

"Ten."

"Jumpin' Jupiter, ten miles over these bloody little stones that knock yer feet all ter 'ell."

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Evening was coming on when we reached the base camp, which was as dreary a place as one could well imagine. A vast number of tents, brown and forlorn, were dotted about the plain, which was churned up by thousands of feet. After standing in the rain for an hour we were allotted tents, one to each section. Sitting on our packs round the pole we cursed the war and everything connected with it. Owing to some extraordinary blunder or carelessness no cooked meal was provided that night, and we turned in after prowling round in the rain trying to find some hut with a few amenities that would make the place tolerable. Greenling and Sampson sneaked off to hunt for booze, but my feet were not in a state for further walking, and, much to my disgust, I had to stay in the tent. My pals returned at midnight with a couple of bottles of *vin rouge* and one of cognac, a loaf, two tins of herrings, and one of condensed milk. I had a piece of candle in my pack, and we sat round and consumed the provisions, which did not last long when attacked by seven hungry men. However, the contents of the bottles warmed us up, and we went to sleep much happier than when we arrived.

Next day I had to report sick with my feet and was excused duty for four days while the others paraded, drilled, marched, and sweated, from six in the morning until five in the evening. When I went to draw a new pair of boots, the Q.M.S. had his back to me, looking for something on a shelf, and I at once recognized a peculiar little white tuft of hair at the back of his head. He turned and I said: "Hullo, Moseley, what the hell are you doing here?" for he had been in my form at school until he left in 1912. He was a couple of years older than I, and owing to luck or influence had wangled a job at the base. My last recollection of him at school was when, during the German lesson, I cut off his white tuft with a pair of scissors. He said nothing during the lesson, which was sporting of him, but we had a glorious set-to afterwards behind the fives courts.

As soon as my hoofs were ready for the road the whole section wangled passes and got a lift on a lorry which took us into town. Several cafés were inspected before

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we selected one in the Rue Nationale. It was obviously a brothel, and it was not long before some of my pals went upstairs with the young harlots who were pretty enough and experts in the gentle art of cajolery.

A couple of Army Service Corps sergeants came in and glared at us as if we had no business to be there, upon which Stephens asked them what they were looking at, and finished up by punching them both on the nose. The bar became rather turbulent, so we beat it before the arrival of the redcaps, and managed to secure a cabby into whose decrepit vehicle we all tumbled and sang all the way back to camp.

In the morning we received orders to pack suddenly, and, after breakfast, marched back into Le Havre and proceeded to the station. After several hours' waiting we saw a train coming in, and were told to get into the trucks labelled "40 HOMMES, 8 CHEVAUX," the officers having coaches to which their servants carried supplies of drink and delicacies.

There were transport horses in some trucks, and several of us were detailed to travel with them. I climbed in and found there was very little room behind the animals, one of which was extremely vicious and started to lash out in all directions as soon as the train moved off. The others became terrified and kicked out in self-defence. In despair I climbed on to the back of the quietest beast and hung on for dear life, expecting every minute to be crushed against the roof, which was only a foot or so above my head. Each time my mount bucked I went up in the air but clung to his mane and avoided coming off. Each time the truck lurched they were flung sideways and stampeded anew. The time seemed endless and I had to stick it until dawn, when, to my intense relief, another man took my place. We stopped at a siding and the cooks prepared breakfast, each man receiving about half a pint of watery tea, a small rasher of bacon and a slice of bread. It was a joy to join my pals and lie down. We were all as black as sweeps, owing to the dust and ashes that came in showers from the engine, which must have been using French or Belgian coal of inferior quality that stank abominably.

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The big doors were left open for fresh air, and some of the men sat with their feet and legs dangling outside, admiring the scenery. The rest of us lay on the floor among the packs trying to sleep. Some jam and marmalade in cardboard containers had got crushed and our coats were liberally smeared with the sticky stuff. At noon we started playing cards and swopped yarns mingled with conjectures about our destination.

"I only 'ope I get a decent blighty the first time in the line," cried one.

"You want jam on it," retorted a voice from a corner, "askin' for a blighty afore you've been in the muck at all."

"I 'ope we go in at a quiet place for a start," exclaimed a little fellow who was already in a blue funk.

"Watch Nobby when the first shell comes over an' yer won't see 'is backside for dust," grinned a tormentor.

"Ay, they'll 'av ter shoot yer, Nobby, fer runnin' away," added another, gloating over the frightened look in Nobby's eyes.

"Can't you leave the b—— alone?" cried the corporal. "You're all bloody chirpy now, but it'll be a different tale when the dirt starts to fly, and some of us will be scraped off the side of the trench like so much jam. I've seen my best pal picked up in bits and buried in a sand-bag, and I know what we're in for when the bloody fur starts to fly."

At each village children would gather round the trucks with the eternal cry for biscuits, bully or pennies. Most of the men were generous, some naturally, others because they imagined that warriors had to be magnanimous, and could afford to disregard such mundane things as pence and bully when there was fighting to be done.

In the middle of the afternoon we had a breakdown that had been threatening ever since we left Le Havre. Several hours passed and we lounged about near the line. I ascertained from the driver that we could not expect to get another engine for two hours at least, so I got hold of Greenling and Sampson and we walked about until the coast was clear, then slipped behind a hedge and, keeping under cover, reached the horizon, whence, to our joy,



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we saw the smoke of a village about four miles away. It was a delightful little collection of houses, hidden away by a fold in the terrain. Just a handful of cottages grouped round a tiny church, away from all main roads, and so completely hidden by trees that one might pass quite near without seeing them. Women were washing clothes on the bank of a stream, children were playing with a donkey, and peace brooded over all. A rustic cemetery crept round the church and moss covered the stones. We went into the church and stood silent while an aged priest came and spoke to us. We told him of the breakdown, and he spoke to us of the war and gave us recent news, which was welcome as we had had none for days. The old man had such a gentle manner and benign expression that I would have liked to stay and prolong the talk, but we wanted food and drink, so left after giving him ten francs each for his works of charity. He gave us his blessing and appeared extremely touched by our gift. Christianity will never die as long as it can produce such men. That old man had three villages to look after and did his rounds on an old bicycle whether it rained, snowed or hailed, carrying a message of hope and comfort to those simple peasants, and closing their eyes with the promise of a better world after their toil was over.

We found the café a hundred yards down the road and in a pleasant garden. The woman who served us said her husband was in the Argonne region, and she had been without news for several days. As we sat drinking she prepared an excellent meal, and was overjoyed when the postman arrived with a letter from her husband, informing her that he was wounded but not seriously. She insisted on treating us to a bottle of champagne that she brought up from the cellar, all dusty and covered with cobwebs. We spent a perfectly happy hour, and left none too steadily, but with joy in our hearts.

When we got back it was dark, and the relief engine had just arrived. It was as ancient as its predecessor, but got going after snorting and threatening to give up the ghost. The men cursed the French railways and all that ran over them, forgetting the enormous burdens imposed on them



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ever since the beginning of the war, and the mobilization of almost all the fit men, so that repair work was most difficult. I assured them that all the French trains were not like the one we were travelling in, and that there were even comfortable expresses.

Our next stop was at a level crossing where the gate-keeper was cursing the delay and consequent disorganization. Some of the men started to serenade him.

"Art thou weary, art thou languid,  
Art thou sore distressed?  
Come to me, old boy, and get your  
Trousers pressed!"

He retorted with a volley of abuse in his native tongue and went quite mad when I sang, "*Il est cocu, le chef de gare.*"

"*Je m'en fous, je m'en fous et je m'en contrefous!*"  
"*Veux-tu que je te bouffe, tête de cochon? Reste là que je revienne, je t'arrangerai à mon retour.*" I shouted with glee.

The men grasped that he didn't like the salutation and soon all were chanting the potent words: "*Il est cocu, le chef de gare*" until he gave up the unequal struggle and retreated into his hut.

We played banker by candlelight and tried to sleep when the illumination expired. At dawn we stopped at a small town and were glad to learn that it was our destination as far as the train was concerned. It was a relief to stretch our legs and we stepped out smartly to impress the inhabitants. An old bent man leaning on a stick stood watching us and someone called out: "*Alleyman no bon, eh?*" at which the ancient drew his hand across his throat, croaked: "*Sales Boches*" and spat to show his contempt for the people across the Rhine.

More rain fell before we reached the billet, but we hardly noticed it, for we were listening to the distant boom of guns that came clearly to our ears. Our temporary abode was an old factory, partly in ruins, with broken pieces of machinery lying about on the floor. There was no water in the place, and we tossed up to decide who should fetch

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some. Shorrocks lost and disappeared with a canvas bucket. I dumped my kit in a fairly damp corner next to an old boiler. The centre of the floor space was dry, but not so private, and passing feet were liable to kick one's things all over the place. Sitting on my pack I changed my socks, for my heels were still tender, and required a little nursing.

Greenling came over for a cigarette, and we discussed the prospects of getting out for the evening. We were both disgusted with the building.

"No one expects anything but hell at the front," said my companion, "but it's a bit thick being shoved in a dilapidated, foul-smelling, skin and hide factory many miles from the line. The bloody place would be condemned by the sanitary authorities in Turkey, who are not particularly squeamish."

"We'll have a damn sight more than this to growl about before we're much older," I replied; "they've got us by the short hairs, and to the powers that be we represent so much cannon-fodder."

I was rather bitter, for it seemed to me that decent billets could easily have been secured in the town. At that moment a message came from the C.Q.M.S., that he wanted me to go with him to do some shopping. The official interpreter was with the quarter-bloke, but his knowledge of English was of a kind that failed under homely tests. He told me with pride that he had been a professor of Germanic philology, and was expert at Anglo-Saxon! The shopping did not take long and we deposited the officers' provisions at their billet, where their servants were busy laying the table, and the smell of the cooking made my mouth water. A gramophone, was playing jazz tunes and the greater ones were enjoying whisky and soda.

Returning to the derelict factory I presented Stephens and Co. with some fancy post cards I had purchased, adorned with lace and bearing sentimental messages such as: "To my darling sweetheart, love and kisses from your soldier boy at the front." The pail of water was being guarded by Shorrocks, for several attempts had been made to purloin it. I stripped to the waist, rummaged in my

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pack for my towel which was not quite black and went over to the bucket. No water was visible, only a thick layer of slime and grey grease.

"How many have washed in this?" I demanded in dismay.

"Only about twenty," laughed Stephens; "skim the cream off, it's all right."

Overcoming my repugnance, I scooped off an inch of solid filth, and made an effort to rid myself of some of the grime on my body and head. Shorrocks was holding forth to Jones about the attractions of French women, and boasted that he was the first man in the company to strike oil, as he termed it. When he went in search of water a female beckoned to him from an obscure doorway and in he went. Then followed a vivid account, complete in every detail, of what transpired before he came out again, half an hour later.

Our stay in the factory lasted three days, and the night before our departure the section went to a café and had a glorious spree. Most of the men were broke, for we had received no pay since leaving England; but Greenling, Sampson, and I were husbanding our resources, and saw to it that our little cabal did not lack drinks or smokes when any were procurable. The café consisted of a large room with a stove in the middle. Three girls smiled behind the counter and we were soon in a happy frame of mind. The damsels laughed at the efforts of Stephens, Jones and Lamont to speak French, which usually was limited to "*Couche avec moi, promenez avec moi*," and so on. Stephens saw a big cat sleeping near the stove, and picked it up, saying he would show us how to play the bagpipes. Placing the animal's body under one arm and its tail in his mouth, he marched round the room, working his arm like a piper, and biting the end of the tail. The cat uttered the most blood-curdling yells, indulged in a crescendo of furious screams, ending up most *fortissimo* with a perfectly horrible roar. I thought the animal was in a bad way and prevailed upon the tormentor to drop it, but it must have been more frightened than hurt, for a few minutes later it was again stretched out near the stove.

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An old man came in with a concertina, which he played well enough to evoke applause, which pleased him, although not as much as the bottle of *Bordeaux blanc* that I put in front of him. The girls danced well and were most agile. We took them in turns and hopped round in our heavy boots to the tune of "*Sur les ponts de Paris.*" The wine warmed the blood and we forgot the damp factory with its stone floor that racked our bones and the uncertainty of life in the immediate future. When the dancing stopped the prettiest girl sang to the same tune a song, half English and half French, of which I can only recall :

*"Après la guerre finit  
Soldat Anglais parti,  
Mademoiselle in the family way,  
Tommy no bloody bon."*

We returned to our hovel at midnight, and spread out our ground-sheet and blanket. The floor was cold and hard, so Greenling, Sampson, and I slept together for extra warmth. Only jackets and boots were removed. We were chilled to the marrow, for stone is worse than earth for drawing the heat out of one. There are few sensations worse than lying tired yet unable to sleep because of the cold. However, worse lay ahead, and often when lying out in the rain and mud I would have been glad of the shelter the much-maligned factory afforded. We moved off next morning, and marched for seven hours in a steady downpour, which cleared as we reached a Belgian village near the frontier and a few kilometres from Armentières. The houses were intact, although a few bore traces of shell-fire, and there were holes at the side of the road that showed recent artillery activity, for the soil was freshly churned up.

As we marched silently up the main street that led towards the trenches, we passed a number of stretcher-bearers, who would have provided an admirable study in grey. They were plastered with grey mud, and their haggard faces were so grey that the mud seemed to have eaten under the skin. The wounded or dead (it was impossible to tell, for they lay so still), were covered with blankets, at the ends of which one saw muddy boots and

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ashen faces. One of the poor devils had his head in a bandage, red and wet with blood. As another passed close to me I heard him groan, and saw blood dripping from the middle of the stretcher. Yet another had only one foot sticking out from under the blanket, the other having been shot off by a bursting shell. As the last stretcher passed us Fritz started to shell the road, and dropped one just at the side of the man with the bloody head. The four bearers went down in a heap, throwing their burden into the ditch, where he moaned in a way that wrung my heart. Two of the bearers were killed and two badly wounded, but the man in the ditch, in spite of a number of fresh wounds, held on to life with incredible obstinacy, and only expired when almost all his blood had left him, and formed a large pool that congealed rapidly in the cold air.

Some of our men were sent to take the wounded to the clearing station in the village, and we resumed our march. Strange as it may sound I experienced no fear, but simply lively curiosity. It was my first taste of shell-fire and so novel that I simply did not think of being frightened. My nerves went to pieces in direct ratio to the length of my stay at the front, but at the beginning I, like many others, did not know what fear meant. A few of the men were pale and suffering from a mild attack of wind-up, but the majority were calm, and if they were frightened concealed it very well.

We were passing through a wood and at intervals a cross or two denoted the grave of a soldier. Some of the trees were scarred, and broken limbs hung from the trunks; a few had been cut in two by bigger shells and the stumps were jagged and mournful.

"Looks as if someone's been diggin' fer buried treasure," said Shorrocks, pointing to some large holes.

"Shut up, for Christ's sake," muttered Lamont, who was rather highly strung; "if one lands on us they'll be able to put the remains in a matchbox."

One tree at least two feet in girth had been split clean in two, and for the first time I felt uncomfortable when I realized what such a shell would do to a man's belly.

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As we stepped over a fallen trunk a burst overhead made us duck, and a large splinter struck a tree, glanced off, and dropped at my feet, after whirling through the air like a swarm of angry bees. It was jagged and about two inches thick. I stooped to pick it up, and snatched away my hand with a curse, for the metal was practically red hot. My pals laughed and made facetious remarks about my discomfiture.

I was talking to Greenling about my sensations under desultory shell-fire such as we were then going through, when there was a nerve-shattering roar just in front, and the whole world danced as a gigantic burst threw up stones, trees, and men. The noise, concussion, reverberation of the air, and acrid smell of explosive, all mingled in a curious stunning sensation. I saw a dark background lit up by myriads of dancing lights. I went down on my face and came round a few minutes later with a splitting headache and feeling that I wanted to vomit. A flat stone had hit my left temple, and the blood ran down into my eye.

A big shell had fallen in the middle of the platoon in front and had made a sad mess of it. Five were killed outright and seven wounded. Some said it was an eight-inch shell, but that was simply guesswork, for there was no means of finding out what it had been. Two men were laughing because they had blighty wounds, but the others were not so fortunate. One wretch had a leg hanging by skin and bone, another had lost an arm at the shoulder and was bleeding to death. Two others were hit in the body and their faces already had that ashen look that denoted the uselessness of any aid man could provide. Before long I got to know that look so well, that I could tell, almost at a glance, whether a man was going to die or not, soon after he was hit. That was useful, for when wounded were many and helpers few, it was no use wasting time over those who were already commencing their journey across the Styx. As I stared at the dead I was gripped by sudden fear, for one man looked as if he had been through a mincing machine and the pieces thrown together. Another man's bowels and brains were lying

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in the mud, his head looking like a large crushed blackberry. Joe Green, who had been with us in the café celebration on the previous evening and had sung "In an old-fashioned town" so sweetly that it still haunted me—there he was, lying split in two from the buttocks to the nape of the neck, just like the carcasses one sometimes sees in butchers' shops. The spine was exposed, bloody, jagged at the end, and the segments were clearly visible. I felt faint and was afraid I was going to collapse, but kept going by an effort of will. I was dazed and mechanically kept repeating some verses from Browning's "Prospice":

Fear death? to feel the fog in my throat,  
The mist in my face,  
When the snows begin, and the blasts denote  
I am nearing the place,  
The power of the night, the press of the storm,  
The post of the foe;  
Where he stands, the Arch Fear in a visible form,  
Yet the strong man must go:  
For the journey is done and the summit attained  
And the barriers fall,  
Though a battle's to fight ere the guerdon be gained,  
The reward of it all.

We took over some support trenches that seemed quiet enough but had been sadly neglected. If a man slipped off the duck-board track he was in danger of drowning in the mud, and we struck water as soon as we stuck a spade in the ground. Soon after our arrival the rain started to come down again and did not stop for forty-eight hours. The floor of our dug-out was muddy and we made it worse every time we went in or out. A trickle of water came in from the trench outside and our blankets were soaked. A bit of string in a tin of grease supplied the light which was about a tenth of one candle-power. We were wet, cold, and as depressed as any men could ever be. Shorrocks sang a dismal song, of which I remember only two lines that were repeated rather frequently:

"O why did I join the army?  
Because I was bloody well balmy."

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I crept outside to watch the Vêry lights that shot up from the opposing trenches as soon as darkness fell. On both sides as far as the eye could reach the coloured flares soared up, lighting up the desolate and devastated waste. The machine-guns on each side were alert, and frequent bursts were directed on anything that looked suspicious. Now and again something went "phut" into the soft earth behind me, and I did not realize that bullets were coming over until Jones dropped with one through the head. He sank down with a curious croak in the throat and the blood spurted out in little frothy bubbles. We covered him with a blanket, and stretcher-bearers took him away to the cemetery in the woods, where we buried him next day.

One of the machine-gunners opposite was a bit of a humorist and tried to play a tune with short bursts that went rât tât tât tât, to which a gun on our side answered tât tât. The part of No Man's Land immediately in front was about two hundred yards wide and utterly desolate, covered with rank vegetation and the usual débris of war. Greenling, Sampson, and I stood for a long time trying to familiarize ourselves with the surroundings, and to accustom ourselves to the feeling that at any moment a shell might come and blow us to smithereens.

After eight days we went up into the front line and could see the German wire on which were hanging a score of limp forms like washing on a line. They went over on a raid just before we took over and were unlucky. While trying to cut the wire they were surprised by a machine-gun that blotted them out. It had been a raid without artillery preparation, and not one came back.

We had already become familiar with the routine of trench life, with its daily stand-to, stand-down, sentry-go, fatigues, and so on. In the dug-out we played banker for cigarettes and lived like pigs.

One night Sampson began scratching and said his blood must be out of order. "Blood be damned, you're lousy, my lad," laughed an old regular; "you'll get used to the b——s after you've been out here a few months." I also had been feeling uncomfortable for some time, and decided



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to take off my shirt and investigate. It was swarming with lice, about ten to the square inch. A woollen body-belt I wore was literally alive, they were as thick as maggots in a decaying corpse. I threw it away and cut off all the hair from my body, for the vermin seemed to prefer the hairy places. Greenling had a tin containing a preparation that he had bought in London, and I rubbed my body with the stuff which had a strong smell, not unlike carbolic, and stung the tender parts, but I preferred the irritation to the horrible nibbling of the lice.

It was a clear frosty night, so I hung the shirt up on some wire hoping the intense cold would freeze the vermin to death. I discovered, after a search, that my spare shirt was missing, and I had to go and bring in the lousy one. Stephens had a stiff brush and applied it vigorously to his shirt, explaining that he was going to put it on inside out, and the survivors would have to crawl through the material, which would give him a little respite.

"You're all wasting yer time," cried Shorrocks. "Why can't yer leave the cooties alone? What's the good of trying to get rid of them, when the bloody dug-out's swarming? Just look at 'em on that wooden prop. Besides, it's not their fault, they've got to get their livin' some'ow. God created 'em, Noah took two with 'im into the ark, an' if we are called upon ter supply 'em with nourishment what the 'ell's the good of grumblin'? Why, damn it all, live an' let live, give the pore little b——s a chance."

I looked at the posts, and they were indeed swarming with lice of all shapes and sizes. Shorrocks kept scratching, but would not take his shirt off, declaring that they kept him warm.

The trenches swarmed with rats, many of which were as big as young cats. They ate all food they could get hold of and nibbled the corpses to the bones. At night they infested the dug-outs, and if we clapped our hands would scatter wildly in all directions. They crawled over our faces and one could smell the filthy things whenever one woke up. One man was fond of asking which would be worse, to be thrown to lions or tied naked in our dug-

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out where the rats and vermin would make things lively enough.

"Wish I could get a bloody blighty," sighed Stephens, scratching his belly with gusto.

"Christ, listen to him," cried Shorrocks in feigned horror; "what the 'ell d'yer want, jam on it? You'll leave yer dog's body in this God-forsaken 'ole an' don't forget it, same as the rest of us. A blighty! Mother of God, an' 'e 'asn't been in the line five minutes! If we're not killed we'll stay in these blasted holes until we've beards down to our bloody knees."

"What did you do in the great war, daddy?" sang out another voice from a dark corner.

"Scratched myself until I bled," yelled Lamont, suiting the action to the word. Then we all chanted in hoarse, cracked voices:

"Take me over the sea  
Where the Alleyman cannot catch me,  
O my, I don't want to die  
I want to go home!"

It continued for many verses but the rest escape me.

"I wonder if people at home will ever know just what it is like out here," muttered Greenling; "and we haven't seen the worst yet, not by long chalks. I suppose when it's over the old legend will be revived that war is good for a nation."

"Well, there are good points even in war," I asserted; "but they are bloody few and far between. I sometimes feel that Ruskin was not much wide of the mark when he said that the conviction on which he acted was that war causes an incalculable amount of suffering and ought to cease among nations calling themselves Christian. But on the other hand, he thought the most beautiful characters were formed in war, that all great nations have been warrior nations and that the only kinds of peace we are likely to get at present are ruinous alike to the intellect and to the heart."

"That was more or less true in old times," replied my pal; "but war is getting more and more mechanical every day, and tends to develop cunning more than any-

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thing else. In a war of attrition such as this promises to be, men lie in wet lousy holes, cursing, and scratching, and sinking, morally, below the level of the beasts. There is courage, comradeship and self-sacrifice, but will anyone gain as a result? When it's over the world will drift back to the rotten old secret alliances, spying and so forth. When fighting was open and hand to hand, men had to be brave, but it was courage of purely an animal kind, in which the stolid brute would always seem more courageous than the sensitive man with delicate nerves and keen imagination. War develops the qualities necessary to the burglar, the foot-pad, the assassin. We mow each other down at long range with machine-guns, and a baboon could do that. There is a sniper up a tree over there in some kind of armour and he's picked off a bunch of our best men while we are powerless. Ten to one he's some miserable little skunk whose only quality is being able to shoot straight, and not fit to be lackey to some of those he's put away."

Lees, a Lancashire mill-hand, came in with a small German shell he had picked up, and started hitting it with a stone to remove the fuse. "Ah! Get to hell out of this," cried Stephens and hustled the souvenir-hunter out of the dug-out into the trench. Ward, a diminutive Durham miner, was sitting with his back against the earth wall and looked wrapped in thought.

"A penny for your thoughts," shouted Sampson.

"Well, I was wondering if any of us are fatalists," he said with a smile.

"Why, of course," asserted Lambert, a big regular, spitting on the floor, "when a shell's got yer bloody number on it it'll get yer, even if yer dig down until yer 'ear 'em stokin' in 'ell."

Such fatalism was common among soldiers and may have contributed to a stoicism that was necessary at times.

"I don't quite agree," put in another. "It seems to me that a man who does not expose himself unnecessarily and takes all possible precautions, will live longer than the fellow who is careless about taking cover, keeping his head down, or not making a noise in No Man's Land."

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As the discussion continued we became more animated and the illiterate made up for lack of logic by frequent use of resounding oaths. I was telling the story of the chap who hid in the desert and a bird dropped a shell on his bald head when there was a terrific explosion outside, and Lees come hurtling down into the dug-out. He was a sorry sight with one hand off, the other mutilated beyond recognition, and an eye hanging out on his cheek. He was still breathing feebly and moaning, but went west while we were trying to bandage his wounds and stick his eye in place. Stretcher-bearers took him away to swell the gathering in the wood where the cemetery had grown considerably since our arrival.

The spells in the line were monotonous in the extreme, and alternated with sojourns in billets behind the line, working parties, and the eternal drills. The air in the holes that we occupied in the trench was fetid, and stank with the smell of dirty bodies, damp clothing, tobacco smoke, and frequent flatulence that was so much a part of our existence that it usually passed unnoticed. But there was no ill feeling; we were much too far from the refinements of civilization to mind such things. In any case it would not have been any use objecting, it was part of the war, like the stink from the latrine just outside.

One night I was in a listening-post out in front of the trench with Bligh, the little curate. It rained until we were like drowned rats and chilled to the bones. Bligh coughed and trembled in every limb. The spirit of the man was marvellous; he was in bad health, but never grumbled. I gave him a pull from my water-bottle in which was some purloined rum. That revived him a little and his gratitude was rather touching. We were only about a hundred yards from Fritz and felt rather uncomfortable, as a couple of men had been wiped out in the hole we occupied by an enemy patrol only a few nights before. The night was dark and stormy, and we could have been blotted out by a patrol a thousand times. A man who can lie out in No Man's Land far from help on a dark wet night and not feel fear is a freak. In spite of the wet and cold I felt the sweat standing on my forehead

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every time anything creaked in our vicinity, and I often wonder if I would have stuck it had it not been for the certainty that I would have been shot had I deserted my post. If I am going to be shot, better let the enemy do it than my compatriots, was the thought that went through my mind whenever fear threatened to get the better of me. I thought also of the disgrace attached to a coward's death, and wondered if one's parents were informed of the event when one was sentenced to death by a court-martial.

Occasionally a shell dropped near, and after a rather close shave I asked Bligh in a whisper if he was all right. There was no reply and I crawled over to him and gave him a shake, thinking he had fallen asleep. I dared not strike a light, but felt over him with my hands. Half his head was missing and the brains and blood came out in my hands. A piece of shell had taken off the top of his head just like one cuts off the top of an orange preparatory to eating it with a spoon. How I lay there with the corpse and my hands smeared with blood I shall never know. When the time was up just before dawn I dragged him back for decent burial, if throwing a man in a hole and covering him up can be termed decent. He had a card in one of his pockets, and when I wrote to his people who wanted to hear from me, I requested to be allowed to keep it in memory of a stout heart. My request was granted. On the card, which I have kept to this day, is printed :

### A PRAYER FOR THE SOLDIER SPIRIT

Teach us, good Lord, to serve Thee as Thou deservest : to give and not to count the cost ; to fight and not to heed the wounds ; to toil and not to seek for rest ; to labour and not to ask for any reward, save that of knowing that we do Thy will : through Jesus Christ our Lord.

We pulled out of the line at midnight, and marched back to billets about ten miles back, where we were accommodated in a big barn, which was not a bad shelter, in spite of the leaks. The officers had rooms in the farm-house, and when not on duty went off to a town a few miles away and had a gay time. Intensive training was indulged in except when hostile aircraft were observed overhead.

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Some of the aeroplane scouts were the most stupid men that could be found, and one, who was severely punished for not blowing his whistle, had not even been told the distinctive markings of Allied and German planes.

The usual rumours started flying round concerning attacks and counter-attacks. The Russians were at first nearly in Berlin and next day were being annihilated. One night Jim Saunders, a big London policeman, went into the village to try and get drunk. He, like many others, missed his beer and was determined, after a win at the crown-and-anchor board, to make up for lost time. He returned long after I had gone to bed, which consisted of a soft layer of dirty straw mixed with dry manure. I asked Jim if he had had a good time. "Hell! The damn beer in this country wouldn't make a hen drunk. I swilled until I nearly burst and am as sober as a judge."

Two days later a number of us were warned to be ready to go up the line as a working party. We assembled at dusk and collected rolls of barbed wire, sand-bags, iron stakes and a good deal of miscellaneous impedimenta. Lorries took us to a sunken road a couple of miles behind the front line and there we dismounted. It was raining in torrents and blowing a gale. I was carrying a dozen or so of sheets of corrugated iron clamped together, and was blown about like a straw. The point to be strengthened was part of an old front-line trench that had been abandoned on account of the amount of water it contained making it difficult to man. Also we had to help the engineers construct a sap about fifty yards from the German wire. There were some uprooted trees lying in front of us which afforded a certain amount of protection, and we worked feverishly to get the job finished as quickly as possible, ducking every time a whizz-bang whistled uncomfortably close. The machine-guns were on the *qui vive*, and bullets flew past like angry bees. One went through a sheet of iron I was holding, and fear came on me again, for it was only a few inches from my chest. I had heard that stomach wounds were dangerous, so turned my backside to the enemy. Then I reflected that at such short range a bullet would drill through one's body as easily as through a sheet

of paper, and that it didn't matter a damn which way one turned.

We worked up to our bellies in water, and Stephens and I took turns at holding and filling sand-bags with sodden earth. Sometimes a particularly bright Vêry light came near us, and I had a mad desire to fling myself into the hole, although the slightest movement would have given the show away. Every stump and post seemed a German, every rustle of a leaf made me tremble. I never knew I was such a coward. I didn't mind facing the enemy with a rifle in my hands, but to dig near his wire with chest and head exposed was an ordeal that I hadn't yet got accustomed to. A man from our patrol came in with a message from the sergeant informing the officer in charge that a man had been killed and another was wanted. A volunteer was called for and I went, not because I was particularly bold, but because I hated standing filling bags while stray bullets flew among us. I figured that on patrol I would be able to keep lower, and facing the danger seemed to me better than standing trembling at it.

I joined a sergeant and three men who were crawling near the German wire. It was tiring and most uncomfortable work; we were soaked to the skin and plastered with mud. I felt something sticky under me and put my hands into the rotten flesh of a stinking corpse. I had become so completely animal that I felt no nausea, simply a grim determination to save my life if possible.

I was crawling with my hands and arms up to the elbows in the viscid guts of a stinking carcass with sepulchral darkness all around, and soaked to the shirt, under which the lice bit like fury, probably trying to burrow under the skin for protection from the elements. Fritz seemed suspicious and his machine-guns were becoming more active. As I crawled barely a dozen yards from his wire I heard a stifled sob and saw Miller lying limp. A bullet had pierced his throat from front to back and shattered the spine. He gurgled a bit and gave some convulsive shudders, then lay still. I took some letters from his pocket and left him to seek the sergeant whom I informed of Miller's death. "No bloody luck to-night," was all he

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said. We had been ordered to take nothing with us in case of capture, so I handed over the identity disc, and kept the letters to post to the dead man's wife as soon as possible. At one point I crept so near the wire that I distinctly heard voices and could make out : "*Achtung ! Potz tausend ! Nicht geplaudert !*" and what sounded like muttered curses.

At four in the morning our job was done and we crowded back into the trench, wet with rain and sweat, caked with mud and utterly weary. A hoarse voice behind me croaked : "Some say good old working-parties, I say muck 'em." The communication trenches were littered with stores and débris, over which we stumbled, and fell full length in the mud and water, cursing loudly. A piece of bent iron flew up when I trod on one end, and cut my shin. Everything went black and I fell down, but was up again in an instant, cursing my pusillanimity for fainting over such a trifle, although I felt I could not keep going much longer.

The lorries were waiting at the sunken road and we climbed in, almost too tired to drag ourselves up. Some talked and smoked, others lay as if dead, while the vehicles rattled and bumped over roads almost obliterated by transport and shells. We ate our breakfast with grimy hands and slept like logs until noon, when we had to parade for a bath. All the men were lousy, although the officers with their collapsible baths, and servants to fill them, were clean enough, and cursed us for coming on parade with mud on our uniforms. We marched eight kilometres to an old brewery where the vats were full of dirty water. Ten men got into each vat after having thrown their shirts down in a corner. I had not had a bath for six weeks, and it felt like six months. As each man stepped out of the bath in which floated lice and dirty scum, an R.A.M.C. private handed out shirts that had been fumigated but looked far from clean.

I examined the garment he handed me, and saw it was covered with red lice, dead and sticking to the cloth. I asked if I could not have a cleaner one.

"Where the hell d'yer think you are, at the Ritz? They're all the same, so it's no use grumbling. Dead men tell no tales and dead lice don't bite. Shove it



on, mate, and thank yer bleedin' lucky stars yer've 'ad a bath," he cried gleefully.

"And thank your bloody lucky stars you've got a bomb-proof job while better men are up the line, you snotty-nosed 'Rob-All-My-Comrades,'" I retorted, angry at the fellow's insolence. He looked me up and down, but evidently didn't fancy the idea of a scrap, and kept his mouth shut.

"Yes, Rob-All-My-Comrades is what R.A.M.C. stands for," vociferated a man with an ugly scar across his chest. "Last time I was in 'ospital them b——s stole all I 'ad, even my bloody souvenirs."

I was still holding the shirt which repelled me on account of the size and colour of the vermin on it. However, my own shirt was buried under the heap, so I had no option, and rather gingerly pulled on the fumigated article. Our bodies were covered with pimples and red marks where we had scratched until the skin was torn. As we left homeward bound, we struck up a merry tune, for spring was in the air and a few flowers bloomed by the roadside. The vitality of youth is unbounded and we laughed and joked as if we hadn't a care in the world.

The day after our return from the bath the company commander addressed us on parade, and announced that soon after our return to the line a raid was to take place, and thirty volunteers were required from our company, and we were given a day in which to think over the matter. I gave my name at once, not from any promptings of courage but because I was so entirely sick of the filth, lice, monotony, and squalor of the life we were leading that any possible outlet was worth exploring. We spent part of our time living like moles, the remainder like pigs, and were being brutalized so completely that I often wondered if we would ever have any notions of decency left. Nor was I blind, even in the worst phases of the war, to the comradeship, *esprit de corps* and friendship that bound us together. But every attack meant so much slaughter and suffering that I loathed it like a plague. When our sole object was to kill and maim, of necessity the flowers of common decency wilted and died.

A model of the terrain to be raided was prepared, com-

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plete in every detail, and we spent days attacking it, until it was felt the raid was bound to be a great success. It only remained for the Germans to run away as we came at them for everything to go according to plan. A rumour was going round that Jerry had started using gas and there was some indignation.

"It ain't sporting," opined a pale fellow whose face twitched in a most alarming manner.

"No, it ain't sporting," replied Sampson in a bantering tone, "but it is most sporting to blast your eyes out, and tear out your bowels for the rats to consume at leisure. For Christ's sake don't desecrate the name of sport by applying it to modern warfare, the foulest, bloodiest, slyest, basest game ever played, if indeed one can call it a game."

His nerves had been rather shaken during our spell in the line, and at times there was a strange look in his eyes, when he spoke of the stinking swollen corpses with which we had been in close contact.

We were told that an 18-pounder gun was to be built into the parapet of the front line, and it was hoped that the effects of its fire at point-blank range would be so devastating that Fritz would be completely demoralized, and offer no resistance. When all was ready we shouldered our packs and set off at dawn. I wondered why no transport was provided, for we arrived at the trenches dog tired. Perhaps the authorities thought we needed exercise. The day was fine, and although the sun was weak it was welcome as a sign of better days to come. We hoped that with the advent of fine weather we would get Jerry on the run, and finish the war before another winter set in with its attendant miseries.

The sector we took over was a few miles south of Ypres and we could hear the guns rumbling in the salient. Our parapet was none too good and we soon discovered that Fritz knocked it down as fast as we built it up. He was able to fire about fifty shells to our one and appeared to have an inexhaustible supply of ammunition, which seemed to prove that he was better prepared in every respect for the war that many thought he deliberately provoked. We

had a waterproof sheet over our heads in the dug-out to collect the rain that leaked through the roof; and one night, after heavy rain, the sheet tore under the weight of water, and deposited its contents on top of us, soaking us to the skin, in which state we shivered until dawn, no dry clothing being available.

The raid was timed for 5 a.m., and try as I would I could not sleep at all the night before. Only Lamont and I volunteered from our section, and the others called us bloody fools for doing so. The gun that was to have been built into the parapet failed to materialize, although I heard that it had been dismantled and brought as far as the supports. At the last moment it was thought that it could not be built into the trench front without giving the game away, so was not used. I handed over the few things in my pockets to Sampson, who promised to forward them to my people if I failed to return. The artillery were to open up on Fritz's wire and front line half an hour before we were due to go over, then lengthen the range and cut off the forward trenches from reinforcements. At 4 a.m. we were putting the final touches to our preparations, and I filled my bottle with cold tea made from water brought in petrol-tins, and which tasted of chloride of lime. It had rained heavily during the night and the ground was like a quagmire, but when the big pots had decided on a raid it had to take place, "D.V. or no D.V." as Lamont put it.

I stood with my back against the wall of the trench, surveying the rising ground in front. Then I climbed on a fire-step to get a better view. By the light of the flares one could see mud, and tree-trunks holding aloft their shattered limbs to the heavens as if protesting against the barbaric stupidity of man. Pieces of equipment and rotting bodies lay in No Man's Land, silent witnesses of an attack that failed some weeks previously. The enemy trenches were higher than ours, and they managed to drain almost all their water so that it ran to us, thereby adding to our discomfort. I thought of crossing the open ground in front and meeting bayonets if we survived the shells and bullets. I visualized the mutilated corpses I

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had seen, and fear gripped me until I trembled in every limb.

With startling suddenness the guns started firing, and from the German lines coloured S.O.S. lights soared skyward. His artillery was at that time far superior to ours, and in less time than it takes to tell, hell broke loose in all its fury. Our front line, communications, and supports, were literally plastered with shells of all calibres. The Véry lights and bursting shells were like a Crystal Palace firework display, only a thousand times more impressive, awful and terrifying. The big shells sounded like express trains roaring overhead, and the deafening nerve-shattering crash, as they exploded deep in the ground, sending up showers of earth and stones and often mangled men, is beyond my powers to describe. I do not believe the horror of it can ever be communicated to those who have never experienced it. The earth shook and heaved, acrid fumes filled the air, and massive jagged splinters of steel came hurtling down, dealing out death and mutilation. It was as if on some overhead platform ten thousand carters were tipping loads of pointed steel bricks that burst in the air or on the ground, all with a fiendish ear-splitting devastating roar that shook the nerves of the stoutest.

Part of our parapet was blown in, and a dug-out demolished by a direct hit, which destroyed the occupants and buried them at the same time. I was covered with earth and flying debris, but clambered clear. As I got up again a sod as big as a pillow struck me in the chest and sent me sprawling in the mud, where I lay dazed and cowed. Before I could get up a shrapnel shell burst about ten yards above my head and a man at my side crumpled up and lay in a pool of blood. I tried to help him but quickly saw that he was beyond help, with a gaping wound in the head and a score in the body. I wondered how much longer my reason could stand it, and had a mad desire to run until I got out of the shambles. I felt that my face was wet, and, drawing my hand across it, discovered it was bloody. Then I saw I was sprinkled with the blood of the corpse near my feet.


Another burst in the air sent pieces of casing and shrapnel

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bullets whizzing down, and I felt a sudden hot stinging pain at the side of my head. Blood flowed freely but it was superficial and nothing but a fairly deep cut. For an instant I was tempted to jab it with my bayonet and go down the line. Then I realized that more shells were falling behind our trench than in it, so decided to stay where I was. A high-velocity shell shrieked and burst in the next bay. Crawling round the traverse I saw Corporal Stamford lying broken up, and yet still moaning. He had a terrible wound in the belly and the genital organs were reduced to a pulp. The left side of his face had been severed as by a gigantic razor. His hands were bloody stumps. I then observed that there had been another man in the bay with Stamford, but his remains could have been gathered up with a trowel. Parts of him were sticking in the sides of the trench, a leg lay in one corner, part of a mutilated trunk in another, while the head was embedded in the parados. With a shock that almost made me faint I realized the remains were those of Greenling, who had been the sentry in that bay. An artillery officer, who had been directing the fire of his battery, was lying on his face with a piece of shell a foot long and as thick as a cricket stump sticking out of the middle of his back. He was dead, so I did not bother to pull it out.

Suddenly a whistle blew and we stood-to, a crowd of white-faced, muddy, and tattered men, with nerves badly shaken. The second blast sounded and it was over the top with the best of luck. No description could do justice to the state of No Man's Land. Imagine looking at a thimble through a magnifying-glass. The ground was so ploughed up that it resembled a stretch of sand where scores of children had dug holes and built castles, except that some of the holes were too big for children to make. One was at least twenty feet across and half full of water. I stumbled and fell into it, but was up in an instant running like a terrified hare in spite of muddy boots, rifle and ammunition. A few yards further on a body tripped me up and left some of its entrails on my boots. Frightened as I was I noticed the foul smell that came from it.

In the dim light of dawn one could distinguish a greenish



yellow vapour hanging close to the ground, and I started to cough and choke. "Gas!" was shouted by someone in front, and quick as thought I dipped my dirty handkerchief in muddy water and tied it across my mouth and nose. We reached the German wire which was cut in places and lying in tangled heaps. A wide gap had tempted some men, but a machine-gun trained on it had taken toll of the attackers, who were lying in a heap. One man was on his knees and looked as if he was praying, but half his face was missing and his rifle, stuck in the ground, held him up. The bullets were zipping furiously and I saw several men drop. Some just sank down, but others seemed to jump up before falling.

The remnant of our raiding party reached the German trench and leapt down into it. I saw a middle-aged fellow reloading and I fell on him with my bayonet through his body. He squealed and fell back while I sprawled over him. I shall never forget the look in his eyes, like that of a hunted animal. He gasped "*Seien Sie gnädig!*" and died. Bombs were bursting all round us but, like maddened beasts, we fought regardless of danger, regardless of all save killing to avoid being killed. A tall officer, who appeared to be in command of the defenders, let fly at me with a big revolver and the bullet took off the lobe of my right ear. Before he could fire again I blew out his brains and ran amuck, shooting and stabbing whenever a grey figure was encountered.

The defenders were putting up a most desperate resistance while our bombers cleared the trench on both sides. After what seemed an age, but which was really only about ten minutes, the Germans were all lying dead or dying. Two or three wanted to surrender but the blood lust was on us and they got no quarter. I doubt if any berserkers ever looked more bloody and frenzied than our group, splashed with blood, haggard, and with demoniacal fury in our faces. A heavy bomb was thrown down a dug-out in which were a number of severely wounded, groaning and crying out for water. A muffled roar sounded in the interior and the place collapsed. I was bending over the officer I had shot when the recall whistle sounded, and I just

had time to grab his possessions and follow my comrades. We slithered and stumbled across No Man's Land with bullets flying about our ears. One man at my side dropped barely a dozen yards from our trench. I was running the last yard when I felt a stinging pain in my left arm and right shoulder, the ground came up and I pitched headlong into the trench.

When I came to, Sampson was kneeling at my side and put his water-bottle to my lips. There was rum in it and it burned my throat but warmed my body, that had got chilled lying in the cold. I was relieved to find I could open and close my hands, so thought the wounds could not be serious. The shelling was worse on our communication trenches, so the wounded were not being evacuated until things quietened down somewhat. I was on a stretcher and trembled whenever a shell came near. My nerves were frayed and the reaction was setting in. I protested that I could walk and tried to get up, but felt so weak and sick that I was glad to lie down again. The whiff of gas was troubling me and I coughed until I nearly choked. Sampson put my things back in my pockets and there were tears in his eyes as he said "Good-bye." My voice was hoarse and weak, but I was sorry to leave my old pal.

"How are you feeling?" he asked.

"Not too bad. The wounds are not serious and I'll soon be back again. I don't pretend I'm anxious to come back but a little rest will put a different complexion on things. Look after yourself and volunteer for nothing," I gasped as they carried me away.

It was only about 8 a.m. but I seemed to have lived a hundred years in the last few hours. We proceeded along the trenches and I greeted the men I knew. "Lucky b——, he's got a blighty," was the usual comment when it was seen that I was not seriously wounded.

The dressing-station was about a mile away, cut in the side of a hill. I was inoculated against tetanus and began to feel feverish. My throat was like a limekiln after the rum, and my head throbbed as if I had been clubbed. There were about fifty men lying about the floor on stretchers and a large number of walking cases. Those who could

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not be admitted were lying and standing outside. Four doctors were working at full pressure, their aprons and hands stained with blood. It was like a butcher's shop. The air was heavy with the smell of blood, carbolic, ether, chloroform, and other odours I could not identify. Some of the wounded were in desperate straits and it was easy to see by the look in their faces that they were doomed. One sergeant, who had been a magnificently built man, had lost both legs above the knees and the stumps were covered with bloody bandages. His face had that ghastly pallor that usually showed death to be hovering near. He was weeping bitterly. Young Crofts, who enlisted at the age of sixteen, bluffing them that he was nineteen, was lying on a stretcher waiting to be attended to. A bomb had burst in his face, destroying both eyes, and mutilating him so frightfully that he would have been better dead. There was a bloody hole where the nose had been and the lower jaw was shattered so that the mouth hung askew in a horrible grimace. I wish a photograph of that charnel-house could be hung in every school in the world. Blood-soaked bandages were lying on the floor. The mud-plastered men, torn and disfigured in the most atrocious manner, groaned and cursed as their life-blood ebbed away. Pools of congealed blood were scattered about the floor and the doctors were now bloody from head to foot.

Several gas cases were there and the worst looked horrible, coughing until they choked. Their faces were bluish green and bubbly froth came out of their mouths. The noise they made trying to breathe was unbearable. At length ambulance cars came and we were lifted and pushed in on our stretchers, four to each car.

The drive to the casualty clearing station was rapid, for at odd times Fritz shelled the roads in the back area. We passed camouflage screens and some recent shell-holes. Then the landscape gradually grew more attractive, green fields and cottages passed rapidly and children played in the roads. Some old folk waved to us as we passed. After a two hours' drive we came to a large camp which had a big board at the entrance announcing that it was the No.



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X C.C.S.; the wards were large marquees in which nurses moved about tending their patients. The slightly wounded cases sometimes never got beyond the C.C.S. and I wondered how I would fare. My wounds were again examined and dressed, after which a label was tied to my jacket. A doctor asked me my age and I wondered what he wanted it for. "Do you mean my army age?" I asked somewhat suspiciously.

"No, I want your real age."

"Well, will you treat it as confidential, as I might get into trouble for giving the wrong age on enlistment?"

"It's purely for my own information."

I told him my right age and he asked me if I had been in the raid.

"Tell me what it was like," he urged, bending over me.

"Well, imagine a crowd of homicidal maniacs running amuck in a munition factory that is being blown up, and through which mud is pouring knee deep. But I cannot describe it, no more than one can describe a nightmare that leaves one bathed in sweat and trembling with fear."

"Well, you will have a few weeks' rest with your wounds, and you may as well spend them in England."

I thanked him and began to sob for no apparent reason. Perhaps it was the thought of getting home again and the nervous exhaustion of the trench battle. Whatever it may have been I felt the tears running down my cheeks and hid my face so that no one could see such an exhibition of weakness. At night we were carried out to a hospital, leaving hundreds of poor devils who would be sent up the line again as soon as they were better. Patching men up with infinite care during the war reminded me of lavishing medical skill on some wretch condemned to the gallows, or stuffing the horse's belly with straw in a Spanish bull-fight, so that the miserable animal may return to be gored again before its guts drop out.

The hospital train was like some gorgeous phantasmagoria from the "Arabian Nights." The beds were snow white, and nurses as gentle as angels moved from bed to bed making us comfortable. I was comfortable but some of my companions were groaning horribly. A man in the opposite

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bunk had been shot in the stomach and was livid. He must have been suffering great agony, for the sweat stood out on his forehead. He wanted to die, and when the nurse came round he asked her for some morphia. She said it could not be obtained without permission from the doctor, who would be round later. I remembered the tablets sewn in my jacket and was able to get them, although the pain almost made me faint when I moved my arms. One tablet was enough to produce a deep sleep, and as soon as the groaning man swallowed one he grew quieter and the awful groans ceased.

I wanted to urinate but dared not ask a pretty young nurse for a bottle. I waited therefore until the coast was clear and crawled along to the lavatory at the end of the corridor. On the way back I met a female who must have been the matron, an oldish person with medal ribbons on her chest.

"Why are you out of bed?" she demanded in severe tones. I felt like telling her I was a somnambulist but the look in her eye would have quailed the Kaiser himself. I blushed, stammered and pointed to the w.c.

"If you want anything a nurse or an orderly will get it and you are on no account to get up. Do you understand?"

I muttered, "Yes, sir," then changed it to "Madame" and wondered if "Your Highness" would sound too pompous. The stomach-case died long before we reached Calais, and a man with a bandaged head said my tablet must have killed him.

"How could one tablet kill when it says on the bottle that one tablet may be taken without danger?"

"The nurse wouldn't give 'im one, that proves it was dangerous."

"Would you rather see a man crying out in agony and do nothing to help him?"

"All the same I wouldn't like to be in your shoes."

"Oh! Go to hell and shut up," I snarled, racked with pain and angered by the nagging tone of the fellow.

In the middle of the night we reached Calais, and were driven to a big hospital, where my lousy shirt was stripped off and a nurse washed me all over. My wounds were

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again examined and probed. There was a clean bullet-hole through the upper part of the left arm and a fairly big flesh wound behind the right shoulder, due I thought, to a flat piece of shrapnel. A chaplain brought a card and filled it up. It was at home when I arrived and ran as follows:

Army Form A. 2042a.

### HOSPITAL REDIRECTION CARD.

On the admission of a soldier to hospital this card should be filled in and forwarded to his next of kin.

---

Number (if any),  
 Rank and Name .....  
 Battery, Company  
 or Squadron .....  
 Battalion, Regiment,  
 Service, etc.....

*has been admitted into*

No. ....Hospital.  
*British Expeditionary Force.*  
*(Letters should be addressed as above.)*

Sick.....

Wounded.....

Signature of Chaplain,

Medical Officer, Sister

or Wardmaster.....

*Indicate here briefly nature of wound or sickness.*

---

A man opposite me had been wounded in the region of the penis, and I watched the nurse lift it with a pair of forceps while she dressed the wound. A doctor came along and went for her for not having a screen round while doing such a job. Probably he thought it would have a pernicious effect on the soldiers' morals. A big Canadian lying next to me had been hit in the head, and raved like a lunatic about his home in Ontario. He appeared to have been a farmer near the Lake of the Woods, for he repeated the names for hours at a time. Trepanning was tried, and the top of his skull removed to get at the splinter that was touching the brain. He died next day.

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Several deaths took place during the three days I was in the Calais hospital, but I had grown callous and continued playing banker while one poor devil was wheeled out with the Union Jack over him. Three walking cases came round my bed, and I could just move my hands enough to take part in the game.

I was wondering one night whether I was going to stay in France for my convalescence, when stretchers were brought in and the blighty cases taken away to the waiting ambulance cars. I felt sorry for those left behind. They watched us with pathetic looks, longing to see their loved ones again but condemned to be thrown back into the furnace without getting home. Officers usually got leave every three months, but men often went twenty or more without getting away. The hospital ship was waiting at the quay with big red crosses illuminated at the sides. We were carried on board and lifebelts wrapped round us, although we would have been a helpless lot in the event of a plunge. It was such a delightful sensation lying in comparative comfort and being able to sleep whenever one felt inclined, far from drills, sentry-go, and the discomfort and weariness that had been our lot in the line. All is relative, and great privations are necessary before one appreciates creature comforts at their true value. A gaunt-looking fellow near me was reading his Bible and muttering that the end of the world was at hand.

"Are you ready for the coming of the Lord, brother?" he asked me in sepulchral tones.

"When is He coming?" I countered.

He came nearer and read out with intense conviction: "But the day of the Lord will come as a thief in the night; in the which the heavens shall pass away with a great noise, and the elements shall melt with fervent heat, the earth also and the works that are therein shall be burnt up." He pointed at me with a long bony finger and shouted: "Prepare for the coming of the Lord, prepare to meet thy God. Yet a little while and the earth shall be no more. Fornicators, adulterers, scoffers and spillers of blood, flee from the wrath to come for ye shall perish and be utterly destroyed."

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"When is the earth going to be burnt up?" I said, pretending to be interested.

"It has started even as was foretold of old when Saint John prophesied and said: 'All nations have drunk of the wine of the wrath of her fornication, and the kings of the earth have committed fornication with her, and the merchants are waxed rich through the abundance of her delicacies. Therefore shall her plagues come in one day, death and mourning, and famine; and she shall be utterly destroyed with fire: for strong is the Lord God who judgeth her,' and the nations of Europe shall be destroyed even as Babylon for their wickedness, but the righteous shall be saved."

"Put a sock in it," yelled someone sitting in the seat of the scornful.

"God is not mocked," screamed the holy one; "repent before it is too late."

"Edison Bell Record," roared another scoffer.

"Ye shall be cast into the lake of fire and brimstone where the beast and the false prophet are and shall be tormented day and night for ever and ever."

"Change the record," bellowed a man with a shattered arm who was trying to read.

"Ye fearful and unbelievers and abominable ones, murderers, whoremongers, sorcerers and idolaters and liars shall have your part in the lake which burneth with fire and brimstone, which is the second death."

"I was saved through prayer," whispered the fanatic, coming so close to me that I felt his hot breath on my face.

"What about all those who prayed and were not saved?" I asked.

I thought he was going to hurl himself on top of me when two R.A.M.C. orderlies came and pounced on him. As they led him away he looked back and shouted: "For true and righteous are his judgments: for he hath judged the great whore, which did corrupt the earth with her fornication, and hath avenged the blood of his servants at her hand." We learnt later that he went mad during a bombardment and was drowned by jumping overboard before reaching Dover.

## CHAPTER X

IT was nightfall when we reached our destination in Hampshire. The trainload of wounded had been distributed all over the country, and a dozen of us found ourselves being lifted from the ambulances in the drive of a mansion of which the front was covered with ivy. It was the residence of Mr. Gates, and had been converted into a V.A.D. hospital to accommodate about fifty beds.

The room into which I was carried was painted white, with flowers at the side of each bed. There were twelve men in the room and most were cheerful. I was washed and put to bed, while the flowers were removed for the night, and a nurse on night duty looked in occasionally to see that we were comfortable. I slept as if I had been drugged until the washing started in the early morning. I was near the window which looked out over a vast expanse of woodland with meadows beyond. All the cases in the ward were clean bullet or shrapnel wounds, so were extremely lively. The gas was troubling me still but not enough to make a fuss about. Each man told in detail what was going on in his sector when he got his wound and we discussed the war, its probable duration and result.

In the evening I was dozing when I heard a voice I thought I recognized, and with a start saw Jean, whom I had known a few months earlier, and from whom I had not heard after she wrote informing me that her father disapproved of our liaison, and had taken her off to Scotland. She was in nurse's uniform and looked so beautiful that I turned away and pretended to be asleep. I heard her coming nearer and realized that she was standing at the side of my bed. My heart was beating as if it would burst and I had to open my eyes. Jean turned pale and walked slowly away.

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My parents had been notified of my arrival and came next morning. They were glad to see me, but mother looked so frail and pathetic that I felt distressed and wondered why she was so despondent. At first she said there was nothing wrong but admitted under pressure that she was worried. Both my brothers had enlisted in the City of London Regiment and were expected home on a few days' leave. The news flabbergasted me, for it was entirely unexpected. Having been in the real thing I knew how great were the risks for the infantry in France, and was filled with anguish. My father stayed three days and mother a week, coming for a few hours each day.

A parson, bluff, and big of paunch, came each day but left me alone after the first visit. He spoke the usual bunk about fighting for God, King and Country. He had a hail-fellow-well-met attitude and was no doubt extremely popular. "Well, my lad, I suppose you are anxious to get fit as soon as possible to have another cut at the Hun, eh?"

I wanted to tell him to go to hell, but refrained, and contented myself with turning my head away. When I thought of the brave men on both sides butchering each other in that German trench I felt a cold loathing for all, whether parsons or laymen, who talked unctuously about fighting for God, and wanting to get well quickly so as to return to the holocaust over the water. There was a British Israelite in the ward, and he had some fantastic theories about the lost tribes, and England being God's instrument for exterminating sinful nations. One day a young nurse asked the parson a number of awkward questions and he told her she was a heretic. One of her questions was whether Moses wrote the Pentateuch and the holy man said there was no doubt at all that Moses wrote those books. "Then how could he describe his own death and the mourning of the people and say that 'there arose not a prophet since in Israel like unto Moses'?" queried the damsel. The sky pilot looked annoyed and told her she thought she was clever but there were things beyond her comprehension.

The following day he preached a sermon to us on the

parable of the talents, and the crass idiot deduced from it that the rich business man is the best servant of the Lord since he adds talents to those he already possesses. "But isn't it wrong to encourage usury?" queried a man who appeared to know his Bible. "How can we believe that the poor are blessed" asked another, "if we are to be punished for not acquiring riches, and cast into outer darkness where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth?"

"Ah! You boys will have your little joke," chuckled the rubicund one and made his escape.

I searched in the bag hanging at the side of my bed and found my treasures intact, save for a silver watch that my mother had given me for a birthday present. The letters I took from the German officer were in a wallet. There was also a photograph that I examined attentively. It was taken in a garden behind a charming old-fashioned cottage, round which grew flowering creepers. The officer was standing up and his wife was sitting in a chair at his side. Four children, three girls and a boy, were playing with their toys. Their ages ranged from three to seven approximately. The boy had a toy horse, the girls, dolls. One girl proudly held her father's hand and smiled up at him. He was an intelligent-looking man, with strength of character depicted in every trait. I felt more wretched than I had ever felt before. I was a murderer and those children were orphans through my act. The widow was weeping and grieving for the man who was lying in the Flanders mud with half his head off, black and swollen like the corpses I had crawled over. I thought of the family in black, and the heart-broken sobbing in the stillness of the night. I put my head under the clothes and sobbed like a child. I felt more admiration for the man I had killed than for many mean skunks who addressed recruiting meetings in England, fulminating against the Boche and throwing handfuls of mud at a brave foe.

I read the German letters feeling like a ghoul, but could not resist finding out all I could about the dead man. There were short notes from the children in large sprawling handwriting. The boy signed his name "Rudolf" in



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letters that were half an inch high, and one of the girls, Gretchen, had copied out a little poem :

*"Gute Nacht !  
Allen Muden sei's gebracht !  
Neigt der Tag sich still zum Ende,  
Ruh'n alle fleiss'gen Hande,  
Bis der Morgen neu erwacht.  
Gute Nacht !*

There was a long letter from the man's wife and here is a free translation :

*My beloved husband,*

*Your letter brought me great joy, and I am looking forward with intense happiness to your leave which seems so near now. The children are very excited and mark the days on the calendar, crying out with glee that there are not many left before the one with a red circle round it. In two weeks you will be here. [The date showed that I had killed the husband four days before his leave was due.] The casualty lists always terrify me but I feel sure God will bring you safely through this horrible business. I pray for you and I know my prayers will be answered because of our dear innocent children. If war makers would think of the women and children perhaps they would not declare war so readily. However, it's no use grumbling, for you and your men are going through horrors of which we have no conception. Hans Schwartz came on leave yesterday and is strolling about the village boasting about his alleged exploits. He thinks war is a glorious thing and no doubt hopes it will continue. To jump from a job as junior clerk to that of an officer in the administration is enough to turn the head of a scatter-brained (leichtsinnig) fool like that. His mother told me he has never been beyond Brussels, but he wasn't aware of that and spoke to me airily about 'we officers at the front.' He didn't know either that she told me that he was doing office work and he spoke of the hardships they had to put up with. If he had to lie in muddy trenches under constant fire he would talk differently. Of course some idiots seem to like war, and Rüdiger Keller, the policeman, who has been wounded three times, says he is anxious to get back to the trenches. But all*

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*his wounds have been slight and he likes to pose as a hero. Poor Schröder the shoemaker who has lost both legs and an eye has a different tale to tell. The men on leave say they would rather be killed than be taken by the enemy for the English torture their prisoners. I wonder if that isn't simply an invention and no doubt the English tell the same tale about us to discourage deserters. The children are all well and keep asking every day and many times a day, when you are coming. It is their first question in the morning and the last one at night. As I write the sun is sinking over the distant hills and a wonderful peace broods over the village. Would to God it were as quiet where you are. Every night when we go to bed I think of you lying out in the mud and cold rain, then I can't sleep. I have been looking over the letters you wrote when we were engaged, and in memory I live those wonderful days over again. When you come we will once more tramp through the pine woods while the children gather flowers and play among the trees. Do you remember that evening in May when you declared your love, and we lingered so long that I was scolded on my return, although time flew so quickly that it seemed minutes instead of hours we spent among the trees? Spot misses you too, and when I ask where you are, and point to your hat and stick, he barks and wags his tail just as he did when he knew you were taking him for a run. . . ."*

The remainder of the letter was too intimate to be divulged. I longed to do something for that woman and her children. If I ever visit her I shall feel tempted to call out: "I murdered your husband and he would have murdered me if he had been able. He shot off part of my ear and it was pure chance that my brains were not scattered on the trench wall. We were both dupes, both fighting like fiends for what we believed to be right, both victims of a system that permits the venal press, secret diplomacy, and those who make money out of war; all these form that detestable Moloch to which the youth of Europe are being sacrificed. They stir up hatred between men who have never seen each other, so that peaceful men become filled with mad blind rage and kill with insensate fury."

Again I slept badly, dreaming of the orphans dressed in

black sobbing round their mother's knee. I saw the man I killed, with head gaping and blood flowing from the wound. He pointed an accusing finger at me and talked. I woke up with a shout and in a bath of perspiration. The nurse came and asked what was the matter. I felt I could not explain so did not try. My terror was so acute that I was afraid to go to sleep again, and tossed on my bed until dawn.

Gradually my nerves recovered, and my wounds healed so quickly that at the beginning of August I was able to go out. The countryside was gorgeous and I roamed for miles in every direction, usually alone. The other patients who were allowed out walked about in groups, and I much preferred to be alone. Those days were so happy that I cannot describe my feelings. Dostoeffsky says that there is in every idea something we cannot communicate to others, even if one wrote volumes and lectured upon it for five-and-thirty years. That is certain, and to try to communicate certain states of soul is as difficult as describing a beautiful landscape to a man blind from birth. It is amusing to read books written about the war by writers who are over fond of sweeping generalizations that look impressive and are extremely specious, but will not bear close examination. We are told that at a certain moment all soldiers thought such and such a thing; that when frightened they behaved in such and such a way, and so on. The truth seems to be that soldiers reacted to the war and all it implied in different ways. The violent discussions among them at all times were proof, if any were needed, that there was no state of mind common to all fighting men. Nearly all detested the war at different times, but in different ways, and for different reasons. One man I knew won the Military Medal when he was so frightened that he hardly knew what he was doing. Another was shot for cowardice when I am convinced he was not as terrified as the medal-winner. Such examples could be multiplied.

I loved to walk to the village for tea and wander through the old church. One day I stood before the altar and wanted to pray, but turned away with a great sadness in my heart, for I realized it would have been a hollow mockery. One day I hired a horse and rode to one of the loveliest



hamlets I have ever seen. I wandered through the lanes and meadows, happy to be alone with Nature, and yet sad at the thought that in a few weeks I would once again be in the maelstrom, that foul thing from which I had escaped once, while better men were lying with their mouths in the mud and arms outstretched, pitiful bundles of bloody rags. I felt I could not possibly get off so easily next time, the odds seemed too great against it. I lay on the grass looking up at the blue sky, and so completely happy that I sang aloud and shouted to hear the echo come back from the hill opposite. Surely one is nearer God in the open air than in dingy, gloomy churches where everything combines to make one dismal, from the mournful tunes to the affected droning sermon. The long, sullen, frowning faces of the average church congregation are enough to make one fly as from the plague. And of course they are quite logical, for the dodging of eternal damnation is no joke; it's a hell of a serious business. Let us hope the religion of the future will be a happy one, finding its God among the birds and flowers, instead of the dark temples designed to keep a monopoly of God's attention, and the hide-bound creeds which must make God have a good laugh. But their God never laughs, he is much too busy planning the destruction of the wicked. I once listened to a Roman Catholic priest commenting on the "Dies irae" we had just sung, and it was perfectly marvellous to watch the joy with which that man made God a most bloodthirsty, vindictive, and hateful person. Another parson I knew commanded his flock to boycott a small tradesman who would not go to church. The poor devil went bankrupt, but was spared a million years of hell if he saw the errors of his ways. It is customary these days for parsons to fulminate against those who take a holiday on any day considered by the barnacle-encrusted Church as sacred. They view with alarm the empty churches, and, like the prophets of old, call down curses on this wicked and perverse generation.

I felt a continual conflict in me between the natural desire to enjoy life, and the vague horror that welled up in me every time I thought of the raid. My nervous system must have had a severe shock, for sometimes I started and

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trembled at a sudden unexpected noise. One day a man tapped me playfully on the back and was surprised to see me pale and trembling. I had been living the raid over again, and thought it was a bayonet in my back.

At eighteen I had killed, seen warfare in its bloodiest phases, and the depths of degradation to which men can sink, as well as the devotion, courage, loyalty, and comradeship they are capable of. But my faith in life had been destroyed. When I considered the thousands of young men, many of them brilliant, who had been destroyed, and tens of thousands, perhaps millions, who were to be killed, maimed, blinded, and poisoned, before the end of the stupendous slaughter, I lost all faith in God, or rather in the beneficent paternal God of the theologians. My mode of reasoning was not logical, but forced upon me by the weight of despair that crushed me when I thought of the things I had seen and to which I was destined to return.

One evening I was returning along a quiet country lane when I saw a girlish figure in front, and realized with dismay that it was Jean. I had found out that she was married to Mr. Gates and was running her house as a hospital. Uncertain whether she wished to be alone or not, and feeling rather embarrassed when I thought of what had taken place at our first meeting, I slackened my step. I was then only about twenty yards behind her, and when she stopped to take a stick from her dog I had no option but to overtake her. She was far more embarrassed than I, but held out her hand, and said she was glad to see me and to know I was almost well again. We tried to converse naturally but the attempt was not very successful. Her musical voice thrilled me as of old, but I felt angry with her for marrying a man three times her age. Just before we reached the house Jean said in a low voice full of sadness: "Will you come and see me this evening after supper? I feel I must speak to someone who will understand or I shall go mad." I promised to do so and we parted near the house. When I reached my room the men were chanting to a dismal hymn-tune:

"Whiter than the whitewash on the wall (*twice*).

Wash me in the water that washed your dirty daughter.  
And I shall be whiter than the whitewash on the wall."

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A man who had had half his rump shot off was cursing at having been marked fit for discharge.

"'Ow the 'ell can I be fit with the cheek of my backside gone?" he demanded plaintively.

"No wonder you got it shot off," vociferated one, "lying on your guts with a mountain like that in the air, Jerry couldn't miss it."

Another patient had been trepanned and was awaiting a silver plate for the top of his head. At times he would remove the leather cap that acted as a temporary substitute, and, holding his nose, blow until the contents of his cranium swelled up out of his skull like a small balloon. That always provoked uproarious mirth. A tall thin fellow named Maynard had lost a foot, but the amputation had been a clumsy job, and the artificial foot hurt so much that he could not use it. After suffering much pain he was informed that the bone would have to be cut again higher up so that the flesh below would act as a pad. He sat with the footless leg stretched out in front of him and cursed until he had exhausted all his stock of expletives. "Don't worry, lad," called out an armless man from an easy chair, "look at the money you'll save in boots. Besides, it'll be useful for planting spuds."

But sometimes the banter was forgotten and furious rage filled the breasts of the mutilated ones. "Last Christmas when we fraternized with Jerry the war ought to have stopped," growled a sightless regular. "The men on both sides had had enough and wanted to put an end to it. But they were forced to go on killing and being killed at the behest of politicians and staff officers far behind the line. Jerry threw tins of jam to us and we threw him cigarettes and tobacco, until an officer came and shot a defenceless German who was shouting: 'A merry Christmas and let's hope it will be the last out here.' On both sides the fighting men respect each other and would stop it now if they could, but they have to go on killing or be shot by a firing squad." And so he rambled on kicking against the pricks that had put out his eyes. Sometimes he wept bitterly, and it was a dreadful thing to see the tears coming from the holes where his eyes had been and running down his scarred face.

At eight-thirty I went down and entered Jean's sitting-room. She had discarded her uniform and was in what I suppose would be called semi-evening dress of black. She turned the key in the lock, threw her arms round my neck, and sobbed as if her heart would break. Between her sobs she told me her story. In a fit of pique she had consented to marry a man of sixty although she was only twenty. This man was known to her father, and approved as a most suitable match, for he was wealthy and well connected. He had to leave her before the marriage was consummated, an urgent telegram recalling him, and then a doctor warned Jean that her husband was being treated for venereal disease, and when she wrote and requested an explanation the choleric fellow brow-beat her like a menial and departed with a mistress to Paris.

"What am I to do?" she sobbed, looking up at me with her beautiful tear-stained face that I longed to kiss.

"Why, get a divorce at once, of course," I replied with conviction.

"But my people are Catholics and would never forgive me."

"Would you rather ruin your life than risk offending your people?"

"Will I be able to obtain a divorce?"

"Well, you have evidence that your husband was suffering from disease, and has lived with another woman since marriage; that is enough to secure divorce in most countries, I think."

We discussed what should be done to ensure minimum of publicity and Jean promised to see her lawyer without delay.

"O, I think life is hateful and men are cruel; I wish I were dead," she exclaimed vehemently.

"When the black cloud that is over you passes away you will remake your life and enjoy it to the full," I replied, taking her hands in mine.

"Can you ever forgive me for the way I wronged you?" she asked, looking in my eyes.

"*Tout comprendre c'est tout pardonner*," I whispered; "the only thing I regret is that you should have suffered through no fault of your own."

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"Do you still love me?" I asked, taking her in my arms.

"I have loved you and only you ever since that wonderful night in Sussex, but tried to forget you, thinking it was nothing but a caprice and that we would both forget after awhile."

I crushed her lips with kisses, and carried her to the couch, where we lay entranced in pure ecstasy, wrapped in each other's arms. She was hungry for love. We caressed and lay pressed together, whispering words of love that fanned the flame of our passion. The fragrant perfume of her hair, the freshness and flexibility of her body, the delightful caresses and prolonged kisses, the exquisite softness of her skin and the beauty of her face, all enraptured me to such a pitch that the world and the war were forgotten in those divine moments.

Next day after lunch we walked for many hours, and had tea in the village, at an old inn standing back from the road. Mine host served us himself, and was most polite, without that nauseating obsequiousness that so often makes one disinclined to enter an hotel where it is practised. After tea we walked down the road, and Jean proposed calling on a dame who was an ardent Christian Scientist. We entered a garden full of fragrant red roses, and in answer to my companion's knock a trim young maid opened the door, and showed us into the sitting-room, which was a pleasant room with some fine paintings on the walls. One was an excellent copy of the picture Ruskin disliked so much: men quarrelling over their dice, by Teniers.

Our hostess was a short fat dame of fifty or so, with grey hair and a round smiling face. She was slightly lame as if suffering from rheumatism, and a bunch of hair grew out of her left cheek, giving her a rather odd appearance. Her dress was simple but of expensive material and she was evidently a woman of some affluence. She greeted us with simple cordiality and was interested when Jean told her I was a patient at her home.

"Have you read 'Science and Health with Key to the Scriptures'?" asked the woman, turning to me.

"No, I'm afraid I haven't," I replied with a smile.



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She assured me that one could not live without reading that wonderful book and that there would be no need for doctors if Mrs. Eddy's system were adopted. The disciple waxed enthusiastic, and poured out the most dazzling array of phrases. They reminded me of soap bubbles, pretty and sparkling but quite hollow. She informed me that God was not a person but just Love. When I assured her I could not imagine love, or hatred, or any attribute of the human personality existing without, or independently of, the person, she launched out into a long rambling explanation that seemed endless. Jean made some excuse and we made our escape after half an hour.

We came to a park, and Jean suggested walking through it, as it was infinitely more attractive than the road, and we would be unseen by the prying villagers who pulled their curtains aside to peep at us as we passed their houses. We followed a path and saw the white-tailed rabbits darting away in the bracken.

"I wonder why rabbits have that little white tuft on their tails," said Jean as I put my arm round her and stopped to kiss the upturned lips.

"If we reasoned as the parsons do we would say it is so that we can shoot them more easily, just as God made man's nose to carry spectacles."

"But let us get back to Christian Science. Tell me seriously what you think of it," and Jean changed step so that her left leg and my right kept together as we walked.

"I am biased and therefore my opinion will not be impartial," I admitted as we stopped at a stream to watch some small ducks that wanted to follow the mother, but were afraid of the strong current. One little one jumped on the big one's back and went for a ride.

"Why are you biased?"

"Because it was manufactured in the United States of America. They may be able to make cars that are cheaper than ours, but I distrust them when it comes to manufacturing religions."

"But they say it is not a new religion, simply applied Christianity."

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"I find it hard to believe that God kept the world in ignorance of the true meaning of the Bible until Mrs. Baker Eddy, U.S.A., found the key."

"The lady we visited says there is no such thing as pain. Is it simply an illusion?" Jean asked.

"If it is it's the most powerful one I know. Tell the man who is suffering untold agonies that it is his imagination, and you can imagine what he will say. It reminds me of a Limerick that I was tempted to tell to the old lady in the cottage, but refrained, because Christian Scientists have usually a remarkably poor sense of humour. It runs as follows:

"There was a faith healer of Deal  
Who said: 'Although pain isn't real,  
When I sit on a pin  
And it punctures the skin,  
I dislike what I fancy I feel.'"

Jean suddenly released my arm and ran like a deer after a tiny rabbit that, scared to death, darted hither and thither, looking for its hole. I caught her in my arms and we climbed to the top of a hill from which the view was gorgeous. Lying on the bracken with flushed face and laughing eyes Jean was irresistible, and I kissed her until she protested she couldn't breathe; then I kissed her eyes and held her so tightly I felt the slightest movement of her body and limbs.

"Will you love me when I am old? If you only love me for my beauty what will you do when it fades?" Jean asked, putting her hand over my eyes.

"When we marry and live together ties will be formed that will resist grey hair and wrinkles. The memories of happy days and nights will live in our minds, and our children will provide the strongest bond of all. Mutual help and companionship unite two people in such a way that when passions are forgotten love and mutual esteem remain."

"There is no justice in the world," said Jean, jumping from the subject as was her wont. "Why are some girls pretty and others ugly? Life is a tragedy for the ugly girl whom we euphemistically dub plain. Most men are idiotic, and at a ball hang round a pretty girl like flies round a

jam-pot; while the plain wallflowers have often more brains, character, and charm, to the discerning eye."

"Most young men pay too much attention to physical beauty, but you mustn't blame them, you must blame the deity for making female loveliness so irresistible to youth."

"I think it is such a pity love and passion are so inextricably bound together that one cannot separate them, for passion is selfish, and seeks nothing but its own satisfaction."

We were watching some bees busily engaged in flying from flower to flower, heavily laden, and droning under the burden of pollen, when Jean brushed back her hair that was in some disorder and said:

"To love and be loved is the most wonderful thing in the world and we are going to be perfectly happy. There is something so completely satisfying in the mere presence of the person one loves that nothing matters save prolonging the moments of bliss. The pity is that so few people realize what real love means. A friend of mine broke off her engagement because her fiancé would not wear a waistcoat; she must have been mad."

"That may only have been a pretext," I suggested. "Breaking off an engagement is like declaring war: any excuse is good enough once you have made up your mind to do it. I knew a man who broke off his engagement when he saw his prospective mother-in-law, fat, ugly, bewhiskered and with legs like tree trunks."

"Are you happy, Wilfred?" asked Jean, with a tinge of anxiety in her voice. "If only the hateful war were over and you hadn't to go back."

"Let us not think about it," I whispered. "Sufficient for the day is the joy thereof. I am happy with you, whether we talk or lie in silence, and let us not think of anything that can mar the pure joy of being together."

Jean then asked me if I liked the poems of Lamartine and I told her that some of them were the finest pure poetry in the French language.

"But they told us at the convent that he was a wicked man. Is that so?"

"If Roman Catholics condemn all who did not conform to their code there will be precious little French literature

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left," I answered with a laugh. "Molière was treated as a pariah because he depicted in his 'Tartuffe' the stupidity and rascality that so often masquerades under the cloak of religion, and most classics are on the *index expurgatorius*, while a not inconsiderable number are on the *index librorum prohibitorum*. Lamartine fell in love with Julie de Desherettes, the young wife of an old scientist. He met her at Aix-les-Bains, and she inspired some of his most beautiful poems, in which she figures as 'Elvire.' When two hearts respond they laugh at the bourgeois conventions, and in 'Le Lac' is a sublime cry of a lover :

*" Aimons donc, aimons donc ! de l'heure fugitive,  
Hâtons-nous, jouissons !  
L'homme n'a point de port, le temps n'a point de rive,  
Il coule, et nous passons.*

"And the glorious last stanza, sad but triumphant :

*" Que le vent qui gémit, le roseau qui soupire,  
Que les parfums légers de ton air embaumé,  
Que tout ce qu'on entend, l'on voit ou l'on respire,  
Tout dise : Ils ont aimé ! "*

We walked home slowly in the gloaming, arm in arm, and felt we had known each other all our lives. The sunset threw flaming streaks across the sky, and the shadows of evening lengthened on the grass. Only the twittering of birds broke the silence until we came to a path, and twigs cracked under our feet.

Next evening I put on a lounge suit and inspected some of the hotels, for Jean was busy and could not come for the usual evening stroll. In one hostelry were some farmers and commercial travellers, drinking and playing cards. I went up to the counter, ordered a drink, and stood chatting to the barmaid, a pretty wench with hair too fair to be natural, rouge on her lips, and a beauty spot on her cheek. She willingly accepted my invitation to have a drink with me, and was telling me all the local gossip when a fat lout, with a face like Danton's, brutal, beery, and pimply, leered at me over his pot of ale and said in a thick voice :

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"Young man, you ought to be in the army, instead of flirting with barmaids."

"How do you know I'm not in the army?" I inquired in gentle tones.

"That's easy to see," he snorted. "Any one can tell you've never carried a rifle and pack. You ought to be ashamed of yourself, skulking at 'ome while better men are fightin' for the likes of you, my young cock sparrow."

"You pig-faced profiteer with the mind of a rat, come outside and I'll push your insulting words down your lying throat," I retorted with some heat.

"You bloody swine, I'll soon larn yer," he bellowed, and we went down to the yard, accompanied by some of his cronies, and a tall gentleman who had been drinking apart from the others. My arms had healed and I felt in good trim. The red bloated face was an easy target, and in a few minutes it was cut to ribbons. When blood flowed from a cut over the nose some of his pals wanted to intervene, but the tall stranger waved them aside and said: "No, keep away, your friend started it and must see it through."

The boor was bellowing like a bull, hoping no doubt to frighten me, but I hadn't lived in barracks for nothing, and each time he charged like a wild boar, he went down from a straight left with all my strength and weight behind it. He was the heavier man, but in hopeless condition, and under the relentless shower of blows his spirit quailed and he went down with a flattened nose, groaning and moaning on the tiles, while one of his cronies bathed his face that looked like a raw streak.

"Perhaps that will teach you," said the tall stranger, looking down at the pitiful wretch, "that they can fight in the army even if they don't go about swaggering like you." He then invited me to have a drink, and I learnt that he was a major in the regular army and had seen me at the hospital. He was a good fellow, one of the best, and spoke to me as if there was no difference in rank. "I don't suppose you are allowed to be out at this hour," he said with a smile, "but life would be rather monotonous if one always conformed to regulations. When I was a subaltern some of my escapades would have got me hanged had I

been caught." He asked me about my school, and I told him briefly the events of the past year. Then he offered to recommend me for a commission and take me in to his battery, for he was in the Artillery. I thanked him and said that if the war did not finish soon I would be glad to avail myself of his offer.

"A stalemate has been reached, and the belligerents are so evenly matched, that, unless the unexpected happens, it will last at least another three years. That is the opinion of men who are in a position to know." My heart sank and I fervently hoped he was talking through his hat. The major noticed my despondency and said in a cheery voice: "Let's drink to old Charon for he will probably take us both in his old boat before long. Why worry? It won't be lonely there, that's one consolation." We raised our glasses and drank. My companion was drinking whisky while I limited myself to beer, not wishing to risk getting merry in case I met Jean, and I would almost certainly see her on my return.

Jean was waiting for me in her room and saw the blood on my hands. I said I scraped them against the wall, but she refused to accept the proffered explanation, and at last I had to tell her what had actually transpired. She reprimanded me gently for exposing myself to possible injury so soon after the healing of my wounds, but was glad the sot had been punished for his insulting behaviour. She had received an invitation to play bridge with Lady B. and her daughter, and had been requested to bring a friend. We went there the following evening, and were shown in by a flunkey with legs like a ballet dancer and a head like a monkey. Lady B. was a curious person who seemed to have outlived her time. She was fairly tall, and resembled nothing so much as a barque in full sail, as she steered her course across the room to meet her guests. She had been a beautiful woman, before years and increasing weight had made her body resemble a large sack filled with oddments and very loosely tied in the middle. Her hair was white, and in spite of her grotesque appearance there was something dignified and austere about her expression which denoted the thoroughbred. Her eyes

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were her most striking trait and flashed as she spoke. She carried a lorgnette, through which she surveyed me as if I were a strange species of animal. Her manners were grand, and she had an idea that she was the only person who mattered in the world. She spoke of her ailments in detail, and then asked me how I was enjoying the war. A nephew of hers was at the War Office and said it was great fun. It was trying at times for he had to do a little overtime but didn't grumble as it was up to everyone to do his bit to win the war.

The daughter was as different from her mother as chalk is from cheese. She was of medium height, thin and with flat breasts and buttocks. Her features were excessively plain, and she wore a most gorgeous dress, which simply served to accentuate her plainness. She appeared to be interested in art, and had studied in Paris and Rome. Every time she started to speak her mother interrupted her and she had to stop. They had just finished dinner, and the old dame hiccupped from time to time in a most alarming manner, but seemed to be so accustomed to it that she was in no wise perturbed.

The bridge-table was brought forward. We cut for partners, and I found myself with the old dame, who had the most weird conventions which she expected me to know without any explanation. I had vile luck at first and my partner soon became irritable. When I passed for the umpteenth time she looked at me savagely and snorted: "I do wish you would call something, partner." As soon as my turn came again I called no trumps, and went up to three. My highest card was the knave of spades and we were five down. Lady B. exploded and upraided me in scathing terms. "Well, you told me I had to call something," I answered, looking ingenuously at her. After the rubber we changed partners and Jean and I were together. We could do nothing wrong, and our opponents fumed and found fault with each other in a manner most amusing to us. The mother held her cards close up to her face, while the daughter held hers in such a way that everybody could see them. When the old girl took a trick she rapped her knuckles noisily on the table and ejaculated: "That's one

## WAR, WINE AND WOMEN

you don't get." At other times she would say: "I can't call, partner, but I've got a good supporting hand" or: "See if you can't put me up one; we must try to save the rubber." The mother retired in a bad temper, pleading a headache, so we played three-handed bridge, and the poor daughter, who was entirely ignorant of the gentle art of bluffing, continued to go down hopelessly. She would not gamble on dummy, and at the end of the evening had to pay out what would have bought a pair of stockings of the best quality. She paid with a bad grace, growling that she couldn't play against cards such as Jean and I were getting, opened the door, and bowed us out with icy politeness.

We went home the longest way, and stood at an old gate in a quiet lane, admiring the landscape bathed in moonlight. The silver orb sailed naked and serene in a cloudless sky, and a thin mist hung over the valley. The picture was of such surpassing beauty that we stood in silent admiration, thrilled to the innermost recesses of our beings.

We walked on slowly until we came to a bank on which the moonlight slept, and there lay and embraced in a fairy-like world formed by moonbeams and shadows. Jean abandoned herself with joy and kissed me rapturously.

A few more days passed all too quickly. In due course the doctor declared me fit, and I secured a few days' leave before reporting to the Command Depot. The last night with Jean was too poignant to recall coherently. My stay at her house had been a period of intense happiness interspersed with moments of acute depression.



## CHAPTER XI

THE seven days at home were a nightmare. Mother was frantic with worry at the thought of my brothers going overseas. My attempts at jocularity fell flat, and sometimes, when I related some humorous incident, there was a far-away look in mother's eyes that showed she wasn't listening, and she would interrupt me with questions about the wet and cold in the trenches, the danger and so forth. I tried to calm her fears but not very successfully.

The books in my room were like the mocking tombstones of a buried past. I picked up a little wooden chest I had made three years previously. It was fitted with a substantial lock, and for a time contained my treasures. The key was in the wardrobe drawer, and, finding it, I unlocked the box and pulled out some papers. One was a pledge to abstain from all intoxicating liquors as beverages. Another was a certificate won in a scripture examination. There were two collections of stamps and an adventure book called "Old Jack" which had been my favourite until supplanted by "Treasure Island," which I dramatized one summer.

There was a watch mother gave me on my fourteenth birthday. I wore it proudly for a few days, looking at the time a thousand times a day, and then pulled the works to pieces. Near the bottom of the box was an ornate certificate decorated with seals and issued by "The Guild of Courtesy," whose rules, boldly set out in letters of gold, aimed at producing a perfect Sir Galahad. On a slip of paper in sprawling handwriting was the solution to the following puzzle. Three missionaries and three niggers had to cross a river in a boat that would hold only two people. All the missionaries could row but only one native. The essential condition was that if the black men were in a

## WAR, WINE AND WOMEN

majority on either side they would eat the spreaders of the Gospel. The solution had been jealously guarded from my brothers who had spent many laborious hours with paper and matches trying to work out the problem. I tore the papers and certificates into shreds and threw them into the grate.

My room overlooked a landscape that had formerly been beautiful, but which was being covered with horrible jerry-built villas, set down regardless of æsthetic or any considerations save those of cheapness. I sat long at the window, watching the shadows creeping over the trees which as a boy I climbed with delight. I mused over those happy days that seemed so remote and since which I had completely changed. My aunt came to stay with us for a few days, and, as usual, was as cheerful as an undertaker's apprentice. She sat bolt upright, and put an effective damper on any attempt at mirth. Her journey down had been most unpleasant, owing to the presence of an engaged couple in the compartment who held hands and sat so closely together that, in my aunt's eyes, it was most indecent. I discovered some verses that described her so well that I left the book open on the table, hoping she would see them :

"Yon ancient prude, whose withered features show  
She might be young some forty years ago,  
Her elbows pinioned close upon her hips,  
Her head erect, her fan upon her lips,  
Her eye-brows arched, her eyes both gone astray  
To watch yon amorous couples at their play,  
With bony and unkerchiefed neck defies  
The rude inclemency of wintry skies,  
And sails with lappet-head and mincing airs  
Duly at clink of bell to morning prayers."

I went out as much as possible in order to avoid a quarrel, for I was in no mood to put up with what I had endured in Scotland just before enlisting. One evening I wandered into some sort of Mission and thought I had wandered into Bedlam. A crowd, composed mainly of men and women, with a sprinkling of children, were behaving in the most extraordinary manner. Some were lying on the

## WAR, WINE AND WOMEN

floor, screaming and beating their breasts. They trembled violently and at intervals yelled with frenzy: "Jesus, my Saviour." Others walked about, shaking as if they were suffering from ague, and uttering unintelligible words. Many collapsed and lay on the floor moaning and trembling. A woman came to me with tears in her eyes and sweat on her brow, and put her arms round me imploring me to be saved before it was too late. She tried to pull me to the floor, but I resisted, and she flopped down alone and lay with outstretched arms howling like one possessed of many devils. Indiscriminate kissing was part of the performance, and it was difficult to see how much of the love was sacred and how much profane. Many were kneeling with their heads touching the floor, and moaning like cattle in an abattoir. Suddenly the lights went out, and the screams, groans, howls, and gibbering, increased in intensity.

When the lights came on again they were waving their arms and shouting, a man came to them and with kisses urged them to redouble their efforts. He was evidently a kind of master of ceremonies, and went all round the hall patting people on the back, kissing them, and whispering encouraging words in their ears. In one corner a group of children were jumping up and down and trembling, as if they were afflicted with St. Vitus' dance. While I watched them one girl, not more than ten years-of age, fell down exhausted, and lay trembling on the floor. The door opened suddenly and a man entered, took a few steps forward, and fell, sprawling over a woman lying in his path. He showed no surprise or resentment, stretched himself out at the side of the woman, and began his lamentations. Then he rose to his knees and started bowing down until his head touched the dusty floor, at the same time beating his breast and uttering loud cries. Some were kneeling with their heads thrown back, staring at the ceiling, waving their fists and shrieking at the roof. A girl about sixteen was spinning round until, becoming quite giddy, she fell to the floor and shook violently. A youth flopped down near her, put his arm round her waist, shouting "Praise Jesus Christ our Lord."

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shire moors, where the climate is surely the bleakest in England. Huts dotted the landscape as far as the eye could reach, and every road was resounding to the tramp of marching men. But there was not much gaiety. Most of the inhabitants of that khaki city had been in hospital, sick or wounded, and were in no mood to return to the trenches. A constant struggle went on between their subterfuges and the doctors' perspicacity. The eager enthusiasm of the old training camps had almost entirely disappeared; the men were sullen, and sat about like lepers in an isolation hospital, talking in low tones, furtively, as if they were afraid of being overheard. The world had become weary, stale, flat and unprofitable; nothing to look forward to, no hope of respite from the maelstrom which had thrown them, bruised and bleeding, on the shore, but which would shortly suck them down again. They were sadder and wiser men, and, in a way, still stunned by what they had been through.

The morning after my arrival I was examined, and the doctor was going to put me in a low category in accordance with custom, when I insisted I was A1. He was so startled that he looked at me for signs of incipient insanity, and asked if I were anxious to get back to the trenches. To my surprise I said I was, and he said he would mark me fit if I did three ten-mile marches. I did them on three successive days and felt no distress, so the M.O. marked me ready for draft. A number of the men had sworn not to go back to France at any price, and during the marches fell out and lay at the side of the road. Some of them were suspected of malingering, but it was difficult to prove. Others coughed, limped, dragged their feet, and complained of pains in the heart.

I was no hero, but at the front one could forget. In the stress of battle one's thoughts were wholly occupied and the faculties, both physical and mental, so keyed up that one hadn't much time for worry. The Command Depot was like billets behind the line, without the excitement of going into action. There was enough flotsam and jetsam from the storm to make the atmosphere in the huts depressing. Many of the wounded were not helpless enough

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to be discharged but would never be fit again, and that preyed on their minds, for they worried about the aftermath with hungry mouths to feed. They would be drafted into labour battalions, or other non-combatant units, to mend roads or push pens, and that they regarded as a disgrace after having been in a fighting regiment.

Next day I wangled three days' leave, and was ordered to report at the draft depot in London. When I got there I discovered that my stay would be extremely short, for drafts were going off almost every day. Jean came to see me, and, by greasing the sergeant's paw, I was able to absent myself from Friday night until Monday morning. We took the train to Brighton, booked a room there and next morning walked miles over the Downs which were at their best. The flaming gorse, the clean fresh wind, the earthy smell, the ancient dwellings, the scattered sheep, and the profusion of flowers, all made us exquisitely happy.

Tired of walking we sat on a hill, hatless, and hugged, watching the blue sea on which a few tiny ships were sailing, so small that they looked like toys. The intense happiness I felt with Jean in my arms, and natural beauty all around, made my heart ache with rapture and dread. The future rose and mocked me like a grinning death's head, and, try as I would, I could not efface the apparition.

We wandered on, and arrived at the high beacon along the border of Stanmer Park, and, entering the park, had a wonderful view of the rolling Downland, Firle Beacon, and Mount Caburn. The martins flashed as they circled and wheeled over the pond, the finches and linnets sang in the trees, and the flowers gladdened our eyes. We lunched at Lewes, and then climbed Mount Caburn, and were captivated by the view.

Tea-time found us at Rottingdean, where we explored the old church, and entered a beautiful old cottage, which had a notice in the window that tea was to be obtained within. The charming hostess served us with old-world courtesy and prepared fresh-toasted scones, which she brought in with delicious home-made jam. Her age must have been over sixty, but her spirit was young, and her manners gracious as those of a queen. The room was small

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"There will be no difficulty about my divorce, for my husband sent me the bill from his hotel in Paris showing he stayed there with another woman. I also have done wrong, but it will be without regret that we shall cut adrift, for there was never any love between us, in fact we never knew each other. Then as soon as I am free you and I will marry."

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On the Sunday we hired a trap and drove to Arundel, one of the most delightful spots on the South Downs. The castle and church are of great interest, but Swanbourne Lake attracted us most, and we wandered on its banks under copper beeches, and saw some spots that Turner has made famous in his pictures. The deer came quite close to us as we lay on the grass, intoxicated by the superb beauty of our surroundings. We discussed whether I should return to London that evening, but the temptation to stay longer with Jean was too strong, and it was late when we drove back to our hotel.

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drug that had the power of increasing the intensity of our emotions.

I returned to the depot, where the first thing I saw was my name included in a draft leaving the next day. I went home for a few hours in the evening, and was relieved to find mother better, but she took no interest in anything, and sat for hours at the window staring into space.

"Why do you sit at the window, mother, instead of reading or doing something to occupy your mind?" I asked her when she refused to look at the evening paper.

"That is the way my boys will come when they return," she replied with a heartrending look in her eyes. "When I look at the papers I see nothing but casualty lists and news of fighting. I cannot read a book while my boys are in danger, so I must just sit and wait until they return."

I returned to barracks with a heavy heart, but a bottle of whisky that I took with me put a different complexion on things, and I shared it with an Irishman from Belfast, who, like most of his countrymen, was a lovable rascal, garrulous, generous, and impulsive.



## CHAPTER XII

WE entrained next morning and followed the route taken by the old battalion a few months earlier. I applied to be sent to my old company and my request was granted. Paddy and thirty others were with me when we marched from the rail-head, and five hours later found the company in billets at Ploeghoek.

Sampson was delighted to see me but his tale was a dismal one. Captain Roughton and two company officers had been killed, together with twenty men. Lamont never returned from the raid and it was rumoured that he was a prisoner in Germany. Poor old Shorrocks and six others had been blown to pieces by a huge minnenwerfer bomb which fell into the trench, and left nothing but a gaping crater. Brown, the medical officer, was dead, killed while attending the wounded under heavy shell-fire with an entire disregard of his own safety. The new captain was, in Sampson's words, "an unmitigated bastard." He was tall, dark, broad of shoulder, and when angry, had a perfectly ferocious expression. About twenty-seven years of age, he had gone from Sandhurst to India, and had successfully destroyed all humane feelings if he ever had any. In his favour it must be said that he had been wounded three times, was perfectly fearless, never spared himself, and put the wind up his officers so much that they tried hard to become efficient. It was not healthy serving under such a man, for he regarded the private soldier as a mere pawn in the game, to be sacrificed with no more compunction than one would show over a ferret that, sent down a hole for a rabbit, had been torn to pieces by a wild-cat. He sported the M.C. with bar, and it was asserted freely that the medal cost twelve men their lives and the bar twenty. Discipline was savage, and the most trivial offence

was punished by exemplary severity ; just before his death he became a sanguinary and licentious madman and appeared to have adopted the motto of Caligula : " Let them hate me provided they fear me."

The battalion was once more preparing for a big attack, and the indications were that it was to be between the La Basse Canal and the village of Grenay. It was common knowledge that the blow was to fall on September 25, and it was impossible that Jerry was blind to the preparations that were going on under his very nose. The night before we were to go up the line Sampson, Paddy, and I, went to an estaminet for a little celebration on *vin blanc* and cognac, which was all they had besides dirty water that masqueraded as beer.

An old man sat smoking near the stove and seemed highly amused at our antics. His face was wrinkled and he hadn't a tooth, but his eyes were bright, and when he chuckled his whole face lit up with glee. He lit his pipe with a hot poker and muttered now and again : "*Ah, ces Anglais, quels diables !*" We plied him with drink until he fell off his chair, and had to be assisted to his cottage next door. He came back after awhile with an ancient blunderbuss and bayonet, with which he ran about the room showing us how he had "*donné son compte au Boche*" in 1870, and lunged furiously at invisible enemies.

Sampson was pensive, and, when I asked him what was the matter, replied that he was thinking of Greenling and the others who had gone west.

" How many of us will be alive to tell the tale this time to-morrow ? " he asked gloomily.

" O hell ! Cheer up, man," I urged, " what's the good of worrying about what may happen ? We can only die once and the gods don't love us enough to want us yet."

He looked at me in a fuddled way and said :

" It's bad enough fighting men, but what bloody chance have we against bullets and shells ? A man may come through once or twice, but this mucking mechanical murder gets any man in the end, no matter how brave he may be. Flesh and blood cannot pit themselves successfully against the hail of steel we have to face in every attack. Let's

drink to sudden death or Blighty," he cried, and we drank the toast in silence.

Next evening we went up at dusk and found ourselves in front of a ruined village. Gas-cylinders were embedded in the parapet ; and it was the first time, as far as I knew, that we used that weapon. I was less resolute than a few months earlier, for I knew what to expect, and was prepared for the worst.

A kid next to me was pale and trembling and I tried to comfort him. He was a puny brat, and his rifle looked too big for him. Tears welled up in his eyes as he asked me the best way to dodge the bullets. He knew I had been wounded and asked in a tremulous voice :

" Does it hurt much when you get hit ? "

" It all depends," I replied. " Most wounds are not serious, and you have a sporting chance of coming through with a whole skin or a blighty at worst."

The gas was turned on about an hour before the attack, and the mephitic fumes hissed along the ground towards the enemy lines. I detested such a method of attack after having seen men coughing up their lungs. To be killed or wounded was bad enough, but the effects of gas were so insidious that it would probably let a man live for months or even years in horrible agony, before killing him. It was a treacherous weapon too, for sometimes a change of wind blew it back on those who were using it. In addition it usually lay in hollows where the wounded crawled for shelter and finished them off. However, the war had become so fiendish, that nothing new in the way of destructive agents seemed to matter very much. We lay listening to the beating of a gong in the German lines, for they had sniffed the fumes, and were no doubt fully aware that they were the prelude to an attack.

The massed guns in our rear belched forth death in a tornado of fury, flame and destruction. Everywhere, both in front and behind, the earth was being tossed up as if thousands of invisible giants were playing at hay-making. Our ears were shattered by a series of roars, shrieks, thuds, bangs, hisses and crashes that assailed us with hellish fury. Each man was like a tiny boat tossed about in an infernal

storm. It was in truth a hell-broth concocted of mangled bodies stirred up in blood.

We crouched down in the trench, expecting every second to be blown to pieces by one of the countless shells that screamed, thudded, and burst, all around, in the air, and under our feet. Short ladders were fastened to the front wall of the trench, and we awaited the whistle that would send the survivors scrambling up them. A big shell dropped into the trench about twenty feet on my left, and tossed into the air masses of earth, dismembered bodies, and *debris* formed of boards, rifles, and pieces of equipment. The horrible fumes of asphyxiating shells made us cough and splutter; our eyes watered and our heads throbbed. A man came running along from the left with a bleeding stump where his right arm had been, and covered with wounds. He fell, and rose plastered with mud and blood, uttered a piercing scream and disappeared round the traverse. He had been badly shell-shocked and was now a raving madman. Jerry kept sending up coloured lights, and, as I watched them, a shower of tear-gas shells dropped near us and made our eyes run until we were blinded. We were as disreputable a crew as could well be imagined, with bloodshot eyes, faces smeared with dirt, and muddy uniforms. We looked like a gang of convicts.

Suddenly the whistle sounded, and up we scrambled, cursing like hell to conquer the fear gnawing at our hearts. The ground in front was fairly flat, but full of shell-holes, and our rifles, extra ammunition, and all the oddments soldiers carry, made us sweat as we ran and stumbled across the uneven ground. Jerry's machine-guns were barking furiously and many of my comrades went down. The bullets cracked like whips. The young kid who had been so frightened in the trench pitched forward with a hole in his chest, probably through the heart. We pressed on in short rushes, between which we lay down for a few seconds to recover our breath. After about ten minutes, which seemed like ten hours, we reached the enemy wire and there the slaughter was awful to contemplate; our men were lying in heaps. Our shells had cut up the wire, but it lay about in tangled masses that gave Jerry a fair

amount of shelter. Two German machine-gunners stuck to their guns until they were riddled by bullets; then bayoneted by a hero who kept shouting "Remember Belgium," and whose *forte* was stabbing dead men with dripping blade. It was almost with satisfaction that I saw a little Jerry disembowel the swashbuckler a few minutes later. We shot and stabbed any living man who barred our way, and quarter was neither asked nor given.

Progress up the communication trench was slow, as it was blocked in many places by the dead and dying, broken trench-stores, and heaps of earth, where the sides had been blown in. Some wounded called for water but we disregarded them and fought on. Our ranks were thinning in a most alarming manner, and it was easy to see that the few yards we had won from the enemy had cost a heavy price. A fellow in front of me whom I had noticed running a crown-and-anchor board in billets came to a wounded German who was holding up his hands and crying for mercy, took deliberate aim and was going to fire when I cried out: "Stop, you bloody swine, or I'll blow your brains out if you shoot a wounded and unarmed man!" He thought I was joking, pulled the trigger, and shot the German dead as he was kneeling with his hands in the air. I fired in my turn and the murderer pitched forward, shot in the thigh, on top of the man he had killed. Fortunately, in the excitement of battle, no one saw the drama, and I pushed ahead until I rejoined my comrades, who, under one officer and a few N.C.O.'s, were working feverishly to consolidate the position.

I realized we were in a desperate plight, for on both sides the advance had been held up, and enemy reinforcements were coming up in large numbers. Blinded with dirt and sweat, we fired and bombed with the courage of despair that comes to men when they see extinction threatening them. Working feverishly we got a German machine-gun into action, and felt somewhat safer. Small groups of grey figures were working their way towards us and got caught by our fire, and lay in grotesque attitudes in the open; several looked as if they were praying, and others kicked spasmodically after they had fallen.



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The scene was like a burial-ground in Madagascar where the dead sit mummified in grotesque attitudes. As I watched the procumbent bodies, I noticed a slight movement, and saw a German officer crawling slowly towards us, using a dead man as a shield. He was armed with a big revolver and looked a determined fellow. While pushing round an obstruction he exposed his flank, and I shot him just below the armpit. He sprang up as if to run back and was immediately riddled. An officer rallied us, and went from man to man shouting words of encouragement, and saying the position must be held at all costs, as there had been no order to withdraw.

We hung on all day expecting every minute to be obliterated by shells, or swamped by the enemy infantry, who, apparently, had not yet realized how exhausted and decimated we were. We had practically no idea of time, and were much too busy looking for those intent on our destruction to bother much about the passing hours. Early in the afternoon young Beech, who was lying next to me, got hit in the face, the bullet smashing his teeth and coming out at the back of his neck. It must have hit the spine and severed an artery, for he could not move and bled to death very quickly. Then Atkins was hit in the chest, and try as I would I could not stop the blood. The bandages were soon soaked and the poor devil started to vomit blood before giving up the ghost. A sergeant came near me to take a shot at a Jerry who was busy sniping, and was just taking aim when a bullet hit him in the head and ploughed a furrow from front to back exposing the brain. He screamed and moaned for a long time before he died with his face bathed in blood.

Late in the afternoon an observation balloon behind us was attacked by a German airman, who was one of the coolest rascals I have ever seen. Anti-aircraft guns blazed away at him and their shells burst all round him. Rifles and machine-guns joined in the hymn of hate, and shot pieces of fabric off the machine. Still he came on, flying low, while desperate efforts were made to pull in the sausage. When he was very close to it they were afraid to fire, for fear of hitting the observers, who jumped out as the tracer

bullets streaked red-hot through the air. After a few bursts Jerry got the balloon, which burst into flames and sent out showers of sparks, a roaring furnace. The observers' parachutes opened as they fell and the airman on whose machine black crosses were clearly visible swooped down intent on finishing them off. The wind suddenly freshened and blew the dangling observers towards the German lines, where they were riddled by machine-gun and rifle bullets, which also caused the parachutes to collapse, and one observer fell a few yards from our hole. The impact was such that he made a hole in the mud with a noise that was audible a quarter of a mile away. I crawled to him but, as I expected, he was smashed beyond recognition, with his head buried firmly in the earth.

At night our situation was even worse than in the day. We were practically encircled by the enemy, our ammunition was almost exhausted, and we were without food, except for our iron rations. Shivering with cold we crawled about, collecting water-bottles and iron rations from the dead. The night seemed endless, and the spasmodic shelling searched and swept the ground all round us. Sergeant Squire was instructed by the wounded officer in charge to take three men and reconnoitre the flanks. I found myself one of the party and we collected as much ammunition as possible. We crawled about two hundred yards to the left, and found that the Germans had consolidated a position round what looked like a slag heap. Away to the right of our position were masses of uncut wire, and Jerry was actually behind us on each flank. At about 3 a.m. we returned to report, crawling over dead and wounded. Some of the wounded were groaning and crying out in a piteous manner. Their wounds and thirst were causing them agonizing pain and no help could reach them. Some would bleed to death, others would shorten their sufferings with a bullet. On our return to the strong point, we found the officer dead, and also nine or ten of the men. A shell had dropped among them and mutilated them in the most fantastic manner. One man's intestines were hanging in festoons from his headless body that had been thrown up on to some bricks. As I crawled back my

face came in contact with the cold, viscid and bloody garlands; I put up my hand, not knowing what I was holding, until I pulled down part of the body and let go with a shudder of horror.

The fumes of gas, explosives, and blood, made me vomit, although I had eaten practically nothing for more than twelve hours. Rain started to fall heavily and our rifles were caked with mud. It had rained off and on all day during the attack, but we had paid little attention to it. Now it was a steady downpour and soaked us to the skin; my shirt was a wet rag and there was water in my boots. The stick and egg bombs of the enemy were far better than the things we were using, and they pelted us all night from a post they had pushed forward on the right. It was impossible to see the missiles coming, and they burst with a wicked crack.

I suggested to the sergeant that we might go and silence our tormentors or they would soon wipe us out. He agreed it was worth trying, and the two of us set out, both armed with Webley revolvers taken from dead officers. The one I had was pretty bloody but quite serviceable. We crawled away making a big *detour*, and gradually worked our way behind our assailants, and when the flares went up were able to make out six figures lying behind a low barrier, with a large supply of stick bombs which they lobbed over with indefatigable energy and relentless determination. The sergeant whispered that we would have to kill them as it was impossible to take prisoners. At about five yards' range my companion gave a signal and we opened fire. There were shouts of surprise and dismay, but, taken completely unawares, they were all shot down in a few seconds. We went forward and were collecting bombs when a shot rang out and the sergeant dropped. At the same instant my instinct told me to drop too, and I fell near my comrade who had a bullet through the head. A young officer, shot through the body, had had strength enough to raise himself and fire. He was raising himself further to take aim at me, when I shot him again in the body which offered a better target than the head. Another of the Germans was groaning on his belly with a hole

drilled through the small of his back. I saw he could not recover and shot him through the head to put him out of his misery. It seemed a brutal thing to do, but appeared to me preferable to leaving him to die slowly in the rain. He must have been enduring intense agony or he would not have groaned in such a piteous manner.

I crawled back to the post and discovered that the survivors, if there were any, had abandoned it. It was nearly daylight but I was afraid to go back, as we had often been warned that to abandon a post without orders in the presence of the enemy was a crime punishable by death. When day dawned I was lying in a shell-hole with the remains of an officer and three men, while the battle rolled on above and all round me. It appeared to me to be the wholesale massacre of brave British troops who were dashing themselves in vain against thick uncut wire and nests of machine-guns. I considered my position, and resolved that if I were still alive at nightfall, and the British advance failed to reach me, I would try to regain the lines behind me. The pangs of hunger and thirst almost drove me mad, and fits of shivering seized me as I lay, wet and muddy, in that waterlogged and blood-bespattered hole.

I searched the officer and on turning him over found a silver flask. To my intense joy it contained whisky and I emptied it in a few pulls. I drank so quickly that I nearly choked, but it coursed through my veins and put new life into me. Without it I doubt if I could have survived that ghastly day, a prolonged and frightful agony. All day long the noise of battle rolled, shells and bullets humming, screaming, and snorting, a few feet above my head.

After dark I fell asleep, utterly exhausted, and dozed fitfully for a few hours. When I woke, the firing was so severe that I decided to await the outcome of the battle before making a move. The winged messengers of death would have caught me as soon as I crawled out of the hole, and life was still sweet in spite of my misery. I drank some dirty water, and found some cigarettes in a dead man's pockets, but the matches were crushed and wet, so I chewed tobacco to cheat the pangs of hunger. Jean

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haunted me and I wondered what she was doing and whether she had secured her divorce.

At certain moments I wanted to give myself up to the Germans, and wondered if they shot and tortured prisoners, as we had been told. At last day dawned, and the dead men looked at me with blackened faces; their stiff outstretched hands seemed to implore burial. Red rockets went up from the German trenches, and were followed by a pitiless bombardment, that threatened to blow me to smithereens every minute. Splinters whizzed through the air like enormous angry bees, and every now and then one buried itself in the side of the hole in which I lay, or struck a body and mutilated the dead. I pulled the bodies over me for protection, and they saved my life more than once when a jagged piece of shell struck them with terrific force and remained embedded in their flesh.

In the afternoon the British guns commenced a furious strafe, and I supposed it to be the prelude to an attack. Some shells fell short and one buried itself deeply, barely a yard from me, but luckily failed to explode. Towards dusk the Guards swept forward and once more I found myself behind our front line. A young lieutenant of the Guards was lying near me with one leg off at the knee. I made a tourniquet with some telephone wire and a stick, and was able to stop the bleeding, after which I dragged him back to our old front line. He was hit in the back by a shrapnel bullet while being pulled into the trench, but it was not serious. When I found a stretcher, a slightly wounded man came along, and we carried the officer to the dressing-station in a house that had been strengthened by the engineers.

The place was packed, and a crowd of wounded were waiting outside. Almost all were in rags, hollow-eyed and dispirited; their faces were the colour of dirty chalk. Two men were led in by a third who was using his rifle as a crutch. The lame one was bleeding at the shin, and his companions had had their faces smashed by a shell or bomb. One was only blinded, but the other was so mutilated that his face was a flat bloody mass of mangled flesh and bones. He looked as if he had been attacked by a mad-

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man armed with an axe and a razor, and I marvelled that he could live in such a state. We deposited our burden on the floor and the officer asked me for my name and number, company and so on, but I pretended not to hear and cleared off.

As I was going back towards the line, a captain stood on a mound at the side of the road and shouted: "Come on, you bloody men, what the hell are you skulking there for when there's a battle on? Come on or I'll have you shot for cowardice, you bloody bastards." He was apparently shouting at me and a few others who had brought down wounded. I had a mind to protest, but he looked a raving maniac and had probably been drinking. He flourished his revolver and seemed ready to use it, so we broke into a jog-trot towards the shambles once more. A sergeant of the Guards collected us in a sunken road where we were given pouches and a supply of Mills bombs. We belonged to a variety of regiments and for the most part were tired to death.

Soon we came to a communication trench and followed it, pressing against the sides to leave room for the stream of wounded, who came down on foot and on stretchers. A Scots captain was waiting for us, and told us we had to retake a trench that Jerry had wrested from us in the morning and had held ever since. As we approached the scene of action, a shower of stick bombs dropped on us, and several men were hit. Those who were not hit started pulling out the pins of bombs and throwing them over the barricade. Some were thrown too quickly and were returned to us before exploding. I was a useful bowler at school, and, if unable to capture many wickets, could hit the spot for hours. Cricket practice now served me in good stead, and I lobbed bombs over the barrier until my arm ached. The stick bombs gradually decreased in number, and it showed that some of the throwers had been put out of action. It was a grisly business killing men one could not see, and watching their missiles come sailing over the rampart.

When our captain judged the moment opportune, he yelled to us to make a dash for it, at the same time jumping on top of the sandbag wall, and shooting at the enemy.

A couple of seconds later he fell back with a hole in his head and a dozen in his body. We crouched down and resumed our throwing, until a German *unteroffizier* and two men appeared on top of the barrier, dragging a machine-gun into position. I pulled a pin out of a bomb, released the catch, and waited a second or two, before bowling a lucky yorker which caused the bomb to burst among their heads, and they went down in a heap, dragging their gun with them. Another of our officers came along and rallied us. He had been wounded in the head and the bandage was red with blood. When he gave the word we rushed forward, clambered over the obstacle and worked along the trench on the other side, bombing, and stabbing with our bayonets.

Most of us had lost our rifles and relied on the bombs we picked up as we went along. A rifle is not much good in a small space, and in a narrow trench I much preferred a revolver or a supply of bombs. My own revolver was choked with mud and had jammed with a cartridge in the breech, so was useless for the time being. We gained about a hundred yards and set to work consolidating the position. Jerry had no intention of allowing us to stay where we were, and soon we realized that our situation was hopeless. The lieutenant who had been leading us lay dead, and I, as senior private, was in command. Most of my companions were dead or wounded, and we were ten out of about fifty who had started under the Scots captain. Some had limped, crawled, or staggered away, to get their wounds dressed, overjoyed at getting a blighty. What would have been regarded in civilian life as a serious accident became a matter for joy and congratulations in an attack, for values had changed. Death would come to most, usually after horrible suffering, so those who got away, even at the cost of a limb, counted themselves lucky.

The resistance we encountered showed once more the fighting quality of the enemy, and I realized they had nothing to learn from us in matters of bravery, devotion to duty and self-sacrifice. We had been told they were cowards, that their officers walked behind in attacks, forcing the men on at the point of the revolver. In my experience a braver and more tenacious soldier does not

exist. The dour way they advance to take lost ground is a magnificent tribute to their courage, and the Prussian officer will lead his men to the mouth of hell. He may be a martinet, haughty, and even insolent, with mediæval ideas concerning his superiority over the common herd, but he is also among the bravest of the brave. Bravery is the monopoly of no nation, and the British press did our men a disservice when it spread weird and wonderful tales about the alleged cowardice of the German army. There were undoubtedly isolated instances of Germans throwing up their hands, and crying "*Kameraden*," but they were no more frequent than the surrender of Britishers, who, seeing all hope of victory gone, wished to save their lives. A man who refuses to surrender, when cut off and without means of inflicting further injury on the enemy, is not a hero but a bloody idiot. I saw many such fanatics sacrifice their lives needlessly.

We held out a few more hours and withdrew before dawn, leaving most of our men lying where they fell. Five days later we were relieved, and the company had been reduced from 200 men to 75. To my great joy Sampson was among the survivors, and had had a lucky escape from death. As he was going over the top a shell burst in front of him, and he was struck on the head by a piece of wood, and lay unconscious for hours, before being taken away on a stretcher. The C.C.S. kept him under observation for a few days and then sent him back to the company. He had a nasty scar across the forehead but otherwise was unscathed.

We marched to a village near Bailleul, where we occupied barns round a farm, and saw drafts arrive to bring us up to strength again. Winter was coming on once more, and the rain never seemed to stop. The farm-yard was a sea of mud, and we huddled together on damp straw at night trying to keep warm. Sampson and I were both offered promotion and both refused. Our dislike of stripes may have been due partly to cussedness, and partly to our wishing to be responsible for nobody's life but our own. An error of judgment on the part of an N.C.O. often cost several men their lives, and I felt too young to command



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men double my age. The Captain had gone away wounded, Lieutenant Black was dead, and Lieutenant Lines, the senior company officer, sent for me and explained that it was my duty to accept promotion, for which my education and record fitted me. He was a good fellow and chatted in an informal way while giving me a drink and a smoke. He had been studying for the ministry when the war broke and said with a laugh: "If it hadn't been for the war I'd have been a bloody parson now." He was a conscientious and competent officer whom I would have followed anywhere, and when he pointed out that the company badly needed N.C.O.'s and that I had no right to shirk my duty to the company, I replied: "Very well, sir, I accept, although as you see it is against my will. Sometimes an N.C.O. has to bully men and that is foreign to my nature. There is something in the simple dignity of the private soldier that appeals to me. I started as a private, and, after sampling a variety of officers and N.C.O.'s, hoped to finish as one, but to show my respect for you I will do whatever you wish."

"I admit there are both officers and non-coms. who make one sick," he replied. "They lack the most elementary qualities of leadership and make up for them by bullying and cursing the men. However, that cannot be helped; it is one of the inevitable evils of war. Do your duty and never mind what others do. When you go outside you will forget the whisky and soda you have just drunk, and all I have said, except that you will be promoted corporal without delay."

Sampson refused to follow my example, and remained true to the freemasonry of private soldiers. He prophesied that I would not keep my stripes very long.

"Just wait till the Captain comes back and tries to make you bully the men. You will politely tell him to go to hell."

"Well, Lines is such a decent b—— that I hadn't the heart to refuse, not being quite as cantankerous as you, you old Lepidosaurian."

Next evening we walked to Bailleul and found an estaminet near the square, where tolerably good wine was obtainable. Several soldiers were sitting drinking, and a

sergeant in the motor transport made love to the barmaid, in a mixture of French and Cockney English. Sampson started playing the piano, and soon had us all singing ribald songs.

An Army Service Corps private was talking loudly about alleged Hun atrocities, and a muddy fighting soldier shouted :

"What the hell do you know about it, anyway?"

"More than you think," retorted the Service Corps man, who looked as if he drove a lorry.

"Have you ever been in the front line?" demanded the other, who was slightly drunk, and in a quarrelsome mood.

"You are not the only bloke who's been in the line," vociferated the other, "everybody knows the Germans 'ave crucified prisoners."

"Crucified be b——," snapped the fighting man; "I saw a Jerry carry in a wounded Tommy, but that would never get into the papers. I also saw the Indians with ears they had cut off dead Germans. They carried them on their bayonets and were going to string them like beads. The atrocities committed by the black troops the French are using, are enough to make one shudder. Suppose Jerry had used black men against us, what a cry of horror would have gone up from the Allies, fighting for God and civilization!"

"It's all part of the bloody game," chipped in a tall, lanky, ugly fellow, drinking alone in a corner. "Kid the troops and those at home that we are crusaders warring against evil, and the necessary fanatical enthusiasm will follow. Allow it to be known that we are fighting a nation as cultured and courageous as our own, and things might become awkward for the idiots who want to fight to a finish."

As we talked and wrangled a series of heavy explosions sounded outside and cries filled the air. The soldiers rushed out and the barmaid dived down into the cellar. I grabbed a bottle of cognac, and Sampson snatched one of absinthe, before following the others outside. Some bombs had burst in the square and among the houses, and the drone of aircraft was clearly audible overhead. A horse galloped past with its entrails dragging among its feet. Some bodies were lying covered with blankets, and everyone seemed to have gone mad. Police and soldiers were

keeping back the crowd, and we decided we had better clear off before anyone questioned us concerning the provenance of our bottles.

It was about eight miles back to billets, and making a detour to avoid the centre of the town, we soon got lost. After walking for nearly an hour, we came to a tiny hamlet, of which half the cottages were in ruins, as a result of shell-fire. We knocked at the door of a dilapidated shack where a light shone through the boarded-up window.

"*Qui est là ?*" cried a cracked voice.

"*Deux Anglais qui ont faim et qui veulent manger,*" shouted my comrade. "*Donnez-nous à manger et nous vous payerons bien.*"

There was some shuffling and whispering inside, then the bolt was drawn, and the door opened a few inches. Through the aperture peered the face of an old dirty hag, with grey tousled hair and bloodshot eyes. She was bent and in rags, with an old army tunic over her shoulders. Her hands were like claws and her skirt was a sack. On her feet were ancient shapeless *savates* and her odd stockings were full of holes. She held up a hurricane-lamp of a type used by the British army, and inspected us closely before opening the door any wider :

"*N'ayez pas peur, madame,*" said Sampson, "*nous sommes tout à fait inoffensifs et ne vous ferons aucun mal. N'ayons pas de quoi mettre sous la dent nous vous prions de nous préparer quoi que ce soit. Nous avons de l'argent et quelque chose de bon dans la bouteille. Nous regrettons excessivement de vous déranger à cette heure tardive, mais nous avons perdu notre chemin et sommes bien fatigués.*"

"*Entrez, messieurs,*" replied the old hag, "*je n'ai pas grand'chose mais soyez les bienvenus.*"

We entered the hovel and were greeted by an old ragged fellow sitting close to the stove. The furniture consisted of two rickety chairs and a table that was bare, save for a black cat that sat on one corner.

The old witch asked us what we would like, and we suggested eggs and chips, having learnt by experience that little else could be procured in these hamlets in the war zone, whence all had fled except the utterly poor and

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wretched. How the inhabitants existed was a complete mystery to me; perhaps there was some relief fund or charity that helped them. Living in constant dread of extinction, and almost always hungry, these victims of war were indeed to be pitied, and it was not surprising that they took advantage of any opportunity to rob the troops and charge extortionate prices for anything they sold.

The decrepit husband produced a dirty frying-pan, which he wiped with a dirtier rag, while the old geezer fetched some eggs and potatoes from the back-kitchen. Three glasses and a cracked cup were found and they accepted our invitation to share our drink. We started with cognac, and then sampled the absinthe, which was potent stuff and soon had them merry. My pal and I ate four fried eggs each and a pan full of chipped potatoes. Coffee and cognac warmed our bellies and we taught the old boy to sing:

"I want to go home (*twice*),  
The whizz bangs and coal-boxes whistle and roar,  
I don't want to go up the line any more.  
Take me over the sea  
Where the Allyman cannot catch me,  
O my, I don't want to die,  
I want to go home."

They cursed the Germans and the *sacrée guerre* which was the cause of all their troubles. Their only son and support had been killed at the age of forty-eight, and they had so far received no pension. They asked us if we had been conscripted at the beginning of the war, and when we told them we were volunteers the man cried: "*Vous êtes de sacrés idiots alors,*" and we agreed. We finished the two bottles in the early hours of the morning, and paid the woman with a twenty-franc note. When we refused to take the change she kissed us and called us her little cabbages, whispering that had she been fifty years younger she would have gladdened our hearts in another way.

We lurched and staggered down the muddy road which seemed endless. Heavy rain started to fall, and we cursed our rotten luck, for there were no means of drying clothes in the barn, and the crowing of cocks announced that the

night was far spent and dawn was at hand. As we trudged along, arm in arm, and heads down, there was a noise ahead, and we started back in horror, for there was a ghost beyond all doubt. It was white and floated in the air. We stood shivering, partly from the wet and cold, partly from fear. As Sampson clutched my arm I pretended to be very brave, and said I would soon find out what sort of a ghost it was, and rushed forward at it. It seemed to move away, keeping a few yards from me, until I ran faster and was nearly on it, when I received a terrific kick in the chest, and was hurled into the ditch at the side of the road. Those ditches were formidable affairs, about six feet deep and full of muddy water, that drained off the road during the rainy season, which lasted from January to December in bad years, and from September to May in good ones.

I thought for a moment I was in danger of drowning, for the ditch was about three feet wide at the top, and the sides were so muddy and smooth that no hold was obtainable. There was not enough room to kick out with my legs, and I was in rather a bad way, when my companion came running, and held out a branch that he had torn from some tree. I grabbed it, and the sudden pull made Sampson lose his balance and take a flying dive into the ditch, where he snorted and shouted that he was drowning. The branch had fortunately stuck across the top and was solid enough to bear my weight, so that after a desperate struggle I was able to pull myself up on to the road and rescue my pal, who was more dead than alive. We had both lost our caps and looked like a pair of drowned rats.

Proceeding on our way, we came to a large ammunition dump near the road, and were allowed to strip and dry our clothes at a fire in the hut. All apertures were carefully blocked up so that hostile aircraft would see no light, and the atmosphere was asphyxiating. Ammunition boxes were broken up to feed the flames, and, as we stood naked near the brazier, great sparks flew out and made us hop and swear lustily. I stepped on a live coal and jumped away from the fire, roaring with pain. A smell of burning warned us to examine our garments, and we found they were beginning to smoulder and were badly scorched. One

of the men in the hut gave us a good drink of rum mixed with condensed milk, and that made us forget our troubles.

Day was breaking as we left, and we came upon a white horse that had no doubt been the ghost of a few hours before. Black mud covered its legs up to the belly and in the dark would make them invisible. The beast was dragging a halter rope, and we mounted, after tying it to both sides of the headstall in such a way as to serve as reins. The cunning animal pretended to be perfectly docile while we led it to the stump of a tree and got on its back, I in front because I claimed to understand horses. As soon as I struck the beast with a stick he started to buck-jump in a most alarming manner. Sampson had never been on a horse before and grabbed me round the waist, and as I was still fuddled by the rum, I clutched the animal's neck and hung on with desperation until he dashed under some trees, and the branches swept us off like flies, leaving us lying cursing in the mud. We arrived back in billets as the bugle was sounding first parade, and we slipped into our places unobserved, having borrowed caps from the cooks.

That day I was notified of my promotion to corporal, and had to take charge of the guard and picket the same night. I was dying from lack of sleep and did not know how I was going to keep awake another night. There were a number of transport and officers' horses in the adjoining field, and we had to supply a picket to look after them, so that I was in charge of eight men altogether. It was again a foul night and the ramshackle barn we used as a guard-room was in no way weatherproof. Rain dripped on the manure and straw, the cold wind came through the holes and cracks, and we huddled round a smoking brazier to get a little warmth. The wood fuel was wet and produced far more smoke than heat. My eyes watered and I coughed, while I smoked a vile brand of cheap cigarette issued to the troops, and for which the Government probably paid high prices to profiteering manufacturers. The men called that kind of cigarette "Stable Returns," and swore they were made of horse-dung.

I had a number of prisoners undergoing Field Punishment No. 1, or crucifixion as they termed it. They were



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tied up to a wagon or limber for four hours every day, received nothing but bread and water, were deprived of one of their two blankets, and performed laborious and filthy jobs invented by the sergeant-major. Also they forfeited all pay and were not allowed to smoke. Those men had been guilty of various offences, some of which would no doubt appear trivial to a civilian, but discipline had to be maintained.

One of my prisoners had told an N.C.O. to go to hell; another absented himself for a day in some neighbouring town; another was negligent while acting as aeroplane scout, and allowed Jerry to take a good look at the position; another struck a match while on a working party and caused the deaths of two soldiers working near. The guilty man had just jumped down into a hole for some sand-bags and escaped the fire he had drawn. The remaining prisoners had been guilty of drunkenness, having stolen a jar of rum and consumed the contents. One of them died and the others were in a bad way for some days. We all stole rum when we could, or anything else, provided it could be done in such a way as to escape detection. I do not mean robbing a comrade, but looting or stealing food or drink from the officers' mess. The prisoners were discussing that perennial topic, the probable duration of the war. The debate was extremely acrimonious and proceeded as follows:

No. 1. "'Ow long d'yer think this bastard war will last, 'Erb?"

No. 2. "Dunno, Bill, too bloody long fer me, I'm afraid."

No. 3. "Never mind, the first seven years are the worst."

No. 4. "An' wot th' 'ell d'you know abaht it?"

No. 3. "A damn sight more'n you, you frowsy-faced son of misfortune."

Then they hurled abuse at each other until they tired of it, and, rigging up a rubber sheet over their heads, started to play cards. I had an idea that cards were taboo to prisoners, but pretended not to notice them. They were a brutish crew and snarled like dogs whenever they argued. Try as I would I could not keep awake and did not think it necessary, as we were not in the line. When I changed

the sentries at midnight I handed my watch to the man I posted, telling him to awaken the next man at 2 a.m. and hand over the watch.

I woke at a quarter to five, and realized at once that something was wrong. The air was heavy with the smell of beer and the prisoners and guards were lying in attitudes that suggested intoxication. One picket was lying in the mud between two horses, an extinguished lantern at his side. The rope had broken, and the horses were wandering all over the place, their rugs hanging in the mud and tripping them up. I kicked the man on the ground and he grunted: "Sawright, Corporal," and snuggled up to the horse's belly against which he was lying. I worked like a galley-slave, and before *réveillé* had—

(a) Caught all the horses, tied them up and straightened the rugs.

(b) Soused the guard with cold water from a pump and restored them to some semblance of sobriety.

(c) Searched the barn for hidden beer and found nothing but the smell of it in every available utensil.

(d) Cross-examined prisoners and guard about the happenings in the night, but elicited nothing, there being honour among thieves.

At about 9 a.m. an extraordinary sight met my gaze. In the middle of the farm-yard stood a group made up of a French civilian, two gendarmes, two red-caps (military police), and an officer from the A.P.M.'s department. The civilian was red of face and choleric, short, fat with an enormous paunch, corduroy trousers and leggings. I could make out from his almost incoherent statements in a shrill voice that he had been robbed of two casks of beer, and that the English pigs must have stolen them. In the middle of the uproar Lieutenant Lines was brought, and listened patiently to the Froggies, who all wanted to jabber at once. The *estaminet*-keeper raved and waved his fat fists, while he tramped round the manure heap shouting: "*Est-il Dieu possible ?*" "*Sacré nom de Dieu !*" "*Merde, Merde, et cul !*" I was questioned and denied all knowledge of the theft. My sentries were sent for, and strenuously repudiated all knowledge of the stolen casks. One of the

gendarmes went nosing round and sniffed in the buckets which he brought in triumph to the officers. The men asserted that they often brought beer from the village, and the smell of it in the buckets proved nothing.

Nothing could be proved against us, but each day the same comedy was played with the same players. One of the gendarmes was quite a smart detective, and would perhaps have solved the riddle in the long run had we not suddenly been ordered up the line. I was detailed to take four men and guard a large dump near Kemmel hill. It was a cushy job and we had a glorious time while it lasted. One of my men was a champion scrounger and seemed to be able to produce food and drink when others were starving. One night I was lying down, and the others, thinking I was asleep, started to chuckle over the stolen beer. From their story it appeared that two of them, having no money, went down to the village determined to get some booze.

The two companions inspected the *estaminets*, and, after careful consideration, selected one where the trap-door over the cellar was rather dilapidated, and in the middle of the night prised it open with a pick-axe. Finding that the casks were too heavy for them they replaced the door, returned to billets, and brought two pals to help. With the aid of ropes found in the cellar, they pulled out two casks and two jars of army rum which the cunning landlord had no doubt bought at a ridiculously low figure from the man who had stolen them. The four men rolled the casks away and carried the rum in a sack. Before they reached billets a faint light in the east announced that day was not far off, so they dumped the booty in a wood and covered it with branches and leaves.

Next night two of the marauders were on guard, but slipped off with their pals as soon as I was asleep, and rolled the treasure to the farm-yard, where they indulged in an orgy of drink. A bucket of beer was drawn from each cask, and a jar of rum poured in to give it a kick. It kicked so well that the swillers were reduced to impotence, and a couple of them had just enough strength and sense to dig a big hole in the middle of the huge dung-heap that usually adorns Belgian farms.

The casks were buried in the middle of the manure and next day the search-party stood on the very spot. On two subsequent nights the booty was dug up, and secret orgies took place in some sheltered spot.

I asked the speaker if the casks were empty. He looked surprised, and then burst out laughing, for he did not know I was listening, and seemed to fear that I would report him. He then admitted the casks were not quite empty and offered to go with another man and bring back what remained in them. I had not the slightest intention of reporting the matter, and it seems to me futile to expect men to respect property when they are trained not to respect human life. In addition the *estaminet* owners watered their beer and made fortunes out of the troops, and this particular specimen was a receiver of stolen property.

Evans and Smith returned at 2 a.m. with two buckets nearly full of beer which smelt strongly of rum. We drank the stuff until we were blind drunk, then lay down and slept like hogs. When I woke up a little boy was standing in the doorway of the shack repeating in a monotonous whine: "My sister plenty good jig-a-jig. Me take you. Five francs et plenty wine. Present for me." The kid was such a tiny brat that I asked him in French how old he was, and he answered that he was ten and his sister sixteen.

Near the dump was a tumbledown cottage in which some artillery officers and sergeants occupied three rooms. The officers had two, the sergeants one, the worst. One day I went over to the place for a cup of coffee and met the N.C.O.s in the back room. The old couple who owned the dwelling refused to move, hoping no doubt that we would advance, and allow them to till their holding once more. They were about two miles from the trenches, and at any moment a shell might have dropped in their house and buried them in the ruins. The peasants in that region were, however, like their kind all over the world, stubborn, avaricious, animal-like and determined to stick to their plot of ground until taken from it by force. They occupied a shed, a kind of lean-to behind the cottage; whether from choice or compulsion I do not know. The female servant was a horrible slatternly hussy, with a mass of dirty red

hair, twisted into a bun at the back of her head. Her blouse was dirty and her big flabby breasts flopped out when she bent to wipe the floor. They told me that her husband or lover was a labourer on a near-by farm, and visited her once or twice a week, remaining closeted with her for an hour or so, after which he disappeared again.

While they were speaking a little furtive peasant came across the field and one of them cried: "There he is, after his girl again!" The little man came in and grinned to us, trying to be friendly. A tall sergeant stood in his way and bellowed: "What! Again?" and other remarks of the same nature. The labourer merely grinned and went into Ginger's room. He was followed by his paramour and her son, a sturdy little fellow about eight years of age. One of the N.C.O.s tried to peep through the keyhole, and the small boy, who was apparently prepared for such a contingency, promptly spat through the hole into the peeper's eye. The aggrieved one swore blood-curdling oaths, and was preparing to smash the door when the others restrained him, and he soon recovered his good humour.

We were attached to a battery for rations, and the grub, tolerable at first, gradually deteriorated, and I paid frequent visits to the Q.M.S. to try to improve matters; but he said they hadn't enough for themselves and could spare no more. The cooks complained that when the officers and sergeants had had their whack there was not enough left for the men. The guns were built into a hedge, and the gunners lived in dug-outs at the sides of the guns. Their shelters were foul in the extreme; the ground was water-logged and the duck-boards squelched under one's feet. I was invited into a dug-out to play cards and found, when my eyes became accustomed to the darkness, about twenty men crowding into a space about six feet wide, four high, and twelve long. The atmosphere was far worse than that of any pigsty, and the occupants were as lousy as the infantry, for they scratched incessantly and cursed the lice. I asked one of them if they could not get a bath and he answered: "What's the good of a bloody bath when the dug-outs are swarming with cooties? We go for a bath about once a month and are as lousy as ever the next day."

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Thick tobacco-smoke helped to vitiate the air, but I was able to distinguish a number of forms crouching round a blanket, on which were money and cards. The water drained into a sump in the corner, which was emptied by means of buckets whenever it overflowed. When I knelt down I put my hands on some thick spit that the smokers deposited on the floor from time to time. A couple of men were coughing and cursing the dampness of their dwelling. They were obviously ill, with white faces and hollow eyes. It was a mystery to me how they escaped pneumonia or consumption. Their blankets were damp but they were forbidden to hang them out to dry on account of hostile aircraft. One man was cursing the officers for living in comfortable rooms and eating the best of the grub. He alleged that they spent most of their time playing bridge and drinking whisky. I asked him if they were as bad as he depicted them and he replied: "I was their mess waiter until I lost my job for sampling the whisky one cold night."

The speaker looked like an Eskimo with a woollen comforter on his head, a sheepskin coat on his back, and sandbags round his legs. They were playing banker and I joined in, but retired broke at the end of an hour, glad to get out of the fetid atmosphere.

I inspected a gun and spoke to the man in charge, who told me with some pride that he was the limber gunner, and responsible for the working and cleanliness of the gun in that pit. He explained how it worked and showed me the shells, which were of two kinds, shrapnel and high explosive. I asked him why some of our shells sometimes fell short, killing our own men, and he replied: "Well, sometimes it's the fault of the gun-layer who is careless and puts on the wrong range, or doesn't level the bubble properly. At times the gun sinks in the middle of a strafe and sends the shells short. Also when the rifling is worn the firing becomes erratic, and extra range is put on to correct the defect, but is not satisfactory. The guns should be sent back for overhaul after so many rounds, but they can't be spared so it's not surprising we kill some of our own men. We get dud ammunition too at times, and you

never know where it's going to burst. The American stuff was pretty rotten at first but is improving gradually." He wore the D.C.M. and M.M. ribbons and in answer to my questions told me he won the first in the retreat from Mons, when he served the gun single-handed while the other members of the crew lay dead, the second for repairing telephone wire under heavy fire when he was a signaller. He wanted to return to India where the climate suited him, and had nothing but contempt for the New Army, whom he described as civilians in uniform.

"Don't you think that considering the short preparation they had they haven't done so badly?" I asked.

"Perhaps so," he answered, "but they lack discipline. You can't make a soldier in five minutes, and although the men are not so dusty the officers are a poor lot. The old regular officer is a real toff and knows 'is job. 'E learnt 'is trade properly an' 'ow to 'andle men, otherwise 'e was soon kicked out, but the new ones know nothing an' will never learn." I thought it strange that he did not swear until he told me he was a Salvationist. He had been sixteen years in the army, and had the professional soldier's contempt for the amateurs, as he termed them.

On my return to the dump we discussed the shortage of grub and decided that something would have to be done. We were getting nothing but hard biscuits, bully, and desiccated vegetables, in insufficient quantities. There was a farm about eight kilometres to the west where we had noticed a big fowl-shed, and it was decided to raid it. We drew lots, and Evans and I lost.

After dark we set out with a couple of sand-bags and reached the farm in a little over an hour. The shed was about two hundred yards from the house and we hoped to get a couple of birds without attracting any attention. Evans suggested that he should crawl into the shed as he hadn't any stripes to lose if caught. The impulse was generous, but I was not going to send a man where I was afraid to go myself, and crawled in after telling him to keep a sharp look-out. I crawled in very quietly in order not to disturb the sleeping roosters. My plan was to grab two if possible and wring their necks without alarming the

others. As I stood up inside, my head came in contact with a perch which I dislodged, and at once pandemonium broke loose. Dozens of hens flew, screamed, cackled and fluttered round my head.

I was not to be denied, and, groping wildly in the confusion, soon had two fat birds whose necks I wrung in a jiffy. As I tossed them out to my comrade he cried: "Come on as quick as you can, there's a hell of a row at the farm and I think they are coming." I tried to dive through the hole and tore away a board in my haste. Taking a bird each, we stuffed them in the bags, and ran as fast as we could, bearing to the right away from the dump so as to put the pursuers off the scent. We left the road at the first opportunity and soon outdistanced the farmer and his men. It was heavy going but seemed safer than the road, where fugitives would attract attention. When we thought the coast was clear we sat down to recover our breath and were just going to light cigarettes. As I felt for matches the sound of voices reached my ears, and it was evident the pursuers were still on our tracks. There was a tree a few yards away and into it we climbed, dragging our birds with us. Four men armed with guns passed right under it, and we watched them until they were again lost in the darkness. Climbing down we changed our direction, and reached the hut safely two hours later.

There was a cheerful fire and we soon plucked and cleaned the birds. The sentry was instructed to challenge any prowlers in a loud voice and detain them until we could hide the booty in the dug-out. The fowls were hung on a spit of thick wire, and the grease dropped into a tin. Smith disappeared, and returned when the feast was ready, with a sand-bag full of bread, that he stole from an A.S.C. food-dump a mile away. There was a sentry there, but the hungry man was not to be balked, crawled round to the back, cut a hole in the tarpaulin, and extracted six loaves.

The bread was a godsend, for we hadn't seen any for days. We had a glorious guzzle as we hadn't had a square meal for some time, and, being without funds until some money arrived from home, I had been reduced to living



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entirely on army rations. It was 2 a.m. when we finished the feast, leaving the bones picked clean and a few crusts of bread. Our bellies were as tight as drums and we picked our teeth like lords, laughing and joking as if we hadn't a care in the world. In those days food, drink, and shelter, were all that mattered; a full belly and a dry kip, after hunger and wet clothes, made us happier than a present of much money could have done in civil life.

I spent most of my time exploring the surrounding country which consisted mainly of ruined houses, devastated fields, and uprooted trees. Some cottages had escaped the shells, and presented a peaceful and wonderfully attractive picture when one came on them nestling in a little hollow, behind a clump of trees, where the shells passed over and burst in the village beyond. The inhabitants of the cottages were usually a woman with a daughter or two, sometimes an old man, bent and decrepit, or even a young one stricken by disease.

One whitewashed dwelling in the corner of a wood attracted me because of the welcome I found there. The mother was about fifty years of age, a charming woman with simple dignity. There was something very sweet in her expression, and I was not surprised when she told me her husband had been a prosperous merchant in Ypres. He was killed while searching for documents in the ruins of his factory. The daughter was a girl of nineteen who left school just before the war broke out. She was a beautiful girl, full of fun and laughter. The son lay in an invalid chair near the stove. His ashen face and sunken eyes showed that he was ill, and the spasms of coughing that shook him every two or three minutes pointed to consumption. He was twenty-three and had been ill for years. Until the war they had hopes of saving him in the Swiss sanatorium where he was being treated; but when the crash came the mother had to bring him home for she was destitute. They lived rent free in a cottage that nobody else would occupy. Washing and sewing brought in a few francs; they collected sticks in the wood, and often brought back tins of bully and hard biscuits, which lay abandoned about the countryside in places where troops had been.

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Some of the dishes they prepared on a rickety little stove salvaged from the ruins were really marvellous.

I made a trip to a canteen ten miles away to get them things they badly needed. When I emptied the sack on the table their gratitude was touching and the mother wanted to give me an I O U so that she could pay me after the war. The son took my hand and whispered that he felt he hadn't many days left, but would not be sorry to die as he could not move and was a drag on his mother and sister, who could go and find work elsewhere when he was gone. He said he would ask the good God to keep me safe during the remainder of the war. Next day he was dead and we buried him in a small cemetery where the stones had been dislodged by shells. They hoped to move him to the family vault in Ypres when the war ended. They had relatives in a village behind the German lines so could not communicate with them in any way.

I avoided the cottage for two days after the burial, thinking they would prefer being alone. While wandering over the hill I came upon a cottage so tiny that I had to stoop to enter. The solitary occupant was an old dame who must have been at least seventy, but who remained as active as a young woman. Her eyes were bright and her cheeks as ruddy as a russet apple. She told me that her neighbour in the valley was a curious fellow who never went out, and seemed to be a German spy. I went down to visit him, and, when near his cottage, saw him working in the garden behind. That gave me an opportunity of inspecting the house, in which I found no lamps or codes, but an enormous collection of stores belonging to the British army. Leaving by the front door I went round to the back and asked the old wrinkled peasant if I could have a cup of coffee. He growled that he had no coffee and was obviously anxious to get rid of me. Then I changed my tone and curtly announced that I was in the Intelligence Department, which had sent me to investigate thefts of army stores. He turned pale and was on the verge of collapse. Then he asked in a cringing tone if matters could not be arranged to our mutual benefit. I requested him to follow me into the house, and there informed him

that he was liable to be shot, and at the very least would get ten years if I reported the matter.

After some discussion I agreed to say nothing about my discovery provided he paid me 500 francs. The old rascal was a regular Harpagon and pleaded he had no money until I showed him it was no use, and gave him a severe fright by catching him and saying he would have to come with me to the district commander. The miser seemed to think I would go away and allow him time to hide or bury the stores; when I proved obdurate he took a ladder, climbed up into the loft and said he would get the money. Climbing up quietly behind him I saw him kneeling down on the dusty floor among a collection of potatoes, onions, clothing, and more army stores. A shaft of light came through the skylight, and, peeping over a heap of sacks that looked full of corn, I was amazed to see the scoundrel loading an army rifle and muttering to himself. He obviously intended to murder me and save his money.

With a spring I landed on his back and knocked the breath out of him. He was a born actor and tried all kinds of tricks to get free; but I was taking no risks and covered him with the weapon while he counted out the money from an old bag stuffed with notes. When I had it safely in my hands I kicked him in the backside and took the rifle away as a precaution, then went straight to the widow and daughter whose cottage was about six miles away. They rushed to make coffee as soon as I arrived, and I handed over the 500 francs, making them swear they would never mention the occurrence to a living soul.

When I next visited the widow and her daughter Marcelle, they were almost in tears, and told me that a young officer, who was persecuting the daughter, had visited them drunk the night before, and frightened them by his behaviour. He said he would return the following evening, and they begged me to stay and help them. I told them I would hide and see what happened. They expected him at eight o'clock and a few minutes before the hour I slipped out and hid in some bushes.

After a little while the fellow appeared lurching up the path. The night was quiet save for the distant rattle of

machine-guns and bursting of shells. The Very lights could be clearly seen, and it was queer how these women lived so near the fighting without any fear, when at any moment a shell might demolish their dwelling, or a slight German advance make it part of No Man's Land. The prowler opened the door without knocking and went into the room. I crept up to the boarded window, and, peeping through the cracks, saw him staggering round the table in an attempt to catch Marcelle. The girl was nimble and avoided him easily enough, which angered him beyond endurance. He snarled :

" *Vous allez vous coucher avec moi ou je vous tuerai.*"

" *Allez-vous-en et laissez-moi tranquille,*" replied the girl.

" *Pour la dernière fois, oui ou non ?*" he roared.

" *Pour la dernière fois, non ; j'aime mieux mourir plutôt que me laisser déshonorer par une sale bête comme vous,*" retorted the spirited young woman, again avoiding him. He was drunk enough to be dangerous and drew his revolver with the intention of frightening them. The mother, thinking he was going to fire, picked up a flat iron behind him and, with a terrific blow on the head, dropped him like a log.

I rushed in, and while the mother was crying that he was dead, felt his pulse and found he was only stunned. It did not take many minutes to truss him up like a fowl and throw him in a shed at the end of the garden. He belonged to a non-combatant corps and the mother told me in a sobbing voice that he had been in the village for a long time ; that he had seduced a number of girls and when drunk was most dangerous. He looked about thirty, and was handsome in an evil way. The mother asked me if I would take a note to an old doctor in the village who might come and attend to him. I found the old man and told him what had happened. He swore vengeance, for his own daughter had been one of the satyr's victims, put some instruments in a bag, and came with me. Blind-folding the prisoner he set to work, and in a few minutes had rendered him incapable of doing any more damage in that way, then took away his revolver and threatened him with instant death if any harm befell the women in the cottage. The threat was effective, for they were able to

leave in peace a couple of days later. They wrote to me from a town far behind the lines, and told me they had found work and were happy. Afraid to stay another night in their cottage they collected their few belongings and fled to a neighbour's house for shelter, after releasing the prisoner who was still too dazed to stand when they left.

One of the men at the dump was an expert tattoo artist, and fellows came from camps and billets to be decorated, so that he made a fair sum of money by pricking their hides. I succumbed to temptation and had a small shield with "Kismet" engraved on my right forearm. "What the 'ell does that word mean?" inquired the artist. "Fate or destiny," I replied. He could not understand why I should want such a word on my arm instead of the usual "True love," "Till death do us part," with a heart pierced by an arrow. Many men came to have a word altered, for Mary or Ivy had been replaced in their affections by Dorothy or Sally. The badge of the 17th Lancers was very popular. It is a skull and cross-bones with "Or Glory" underneath. The palm for originality was won by a big gunner, who took down his trousers and pulled up his shirt, revealing a pack of hounds in full cry from the left shoulder to the middle of the rump. The fox had disappeared up the rectum, only the end of its tail protruding. It was a work of art worthy of the highest commendation, original in conception, bold and imaginative in execution.

There was a cinema in a village a few miles from the dump and we went there in turns. After much jostling and pushing I got into the hall, a small, badly ventilated, and overcrowded place. It was built to hold about three hundred in comfort, and about a thousand had crowded into it. Almost all smoked and one could hardly see the screen. The crowd was a mixture of non-combatants in cushy jobs far behind the line, and fighting men out for a so-called rest. A sturdy youngster near me with his hair well greased and parted in the middle wore "A.S.C." on his shoulder and was grumbling to a pal that he had no fire in his office. I thought of old Bryant, the father of seven children, twice wounded before going west in the last attack.

### CHAPTER XIII

THE battalion came out next day and I was given a clerical job that I felt I wouldn't hold long, for the Captain was back and there was no love lost between us. My job was cushy in the extreme and meant about two hours' work per day. Sundry returns had to be prepared, and one had to be ready to inform the battalion H.Q. at any moment how many gas respirators were in hand, what was the state of the iron rations, how many illegitimate children Private B. was paying for, how much ammunition was required, who was next for leave, and a thousand other things.

On the first day of my new job the Captain sent for me, glowered, and ordered me to write an answer to a demand from battalion H.Q. who wanted to know at once why there was so much dust in front of our billets, for they feared it would attract the attention of Jerry's artillery. The dust was caused by transport belonging to other regiments and the Captain made some suggestions as to how it might be prevented or minimized. I wrote out the report and took it to him for signature. He scanned it and his evil face went black with anger before bellowing: "Don't you know better than to split your infinitives? Have you no bloody education?" and a good deal more to the same effect.

I saluted and withdrew, returning after ten minutes or so with the thing rewritten, and an awkward construction in place of the offending split infinitive. When I handed it to the wrathful Captain some devil in me made me point out, very deferentially, that, according to the best authorities, a split infinitive is sometimes allowable. The maniac went purple, foamed at the mouth, blew out his neck until it looked as if it would burst, and swore for five minutes

without stopping, while I stood rigidly at attention. Within the space of a few minutes I had been passed as fit for death by shooting, torture, drowning, and divers other ways; threatened with imprisonment, loss of character and military degradation. I was dismissed with the order never again to open my bloody mouth to a superior officer, and told to go to hell. I withdrew to my office and laughed with fiendish glee at having brought the maniac so near suffocation.

Next day a circular was received asking for the names of men who had distinguished themselves in certain engagements. We had several acts on record that richly deserved recognition, but to my amazement the Captain told me that the men had done nothing but their duty. In other companies men were sporting all kinds of ribbons, while equally brave acts in ours went unrewarded. That captain must have been sent to us straight from hell. He was pitiless, and always had a number of men on Field Punishment No. 1 for trifling offences. I have always maintained that such punishment is at times necessary to maintain discipline. If a man is sent to prison he gets away from danger and all the wretchedness of trench life. Therefore it seems to me that a man who commits a crime must be punished and kept in the danger zone, but the Captain overdid it, and the men were usually sullen and resentful.

In the end he got what he deserved. His favourite N.C.O. was a bullying sergeant who goaded men until they clenched their fists or muttered, and were promptly given fourteen or even twenty-eight days F.P. No. 1. The punishment was carried out whenever we were out in billets, and the police sergeant seemed to be happy when tying the poor devils up. It was bad enough when they could stand, but he tied them in such a way that their feet were pulled a yard apart, and they stood on the sides. A few men liked to be on F.P. for it gave them the air of martyrs, and when the punishment was up they were well supplied with smokes and booze by their pals. Repeatedly soldiers were sentenced to crucifixion because they resented being treated like dogs by half-drunken officers or N.C.O.'s and were put under arrest for "dumb insolence,"

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when they said nothing but looked as if they would like to give the tormentor what he richly deserved.

One day the Captain cursed me for tying the prisoners loosely and pulled the ropes until the wretches could not move an inch. I don't know why I had to tie them up that day, probably because the police sergeant was busy elsewhere. We were expecting to go back up the line when news came that the Captain was in hospital with concussion. He got drunk in the mess and in a fit of bravado said he would try to disarm the sentry, and punish him for carelessness if successful. A mess servant warned the sentry, who dealt the Captain a terrific blow on the head, as he crawled on after being challenged. Needless to say, the men received the news with great joy and got drunk in the *estaminets* to celebrate the occasion. The only comment I heard was: "Pity he didn't break his bloody neck."

It was about that time that I was given the job of censoring letters which the officers usually did, but got fed up with it and passed it on to me. I read them and passed them to the orderly officer for signature. Many of them were amusing and most frank about sexual matters. Some contained trivial details about farms or businesses that the writers were never to see again. Several missives contained threats to sell up the home if the wife did not remain faithful.

There were a certain number of green envelopes that I dished out when available. The men much preferred them to the ordinary kind, for they were censored at the base by a stranger, and it was hateful to know that one's domestic affairs had otherwise to be inspected by officers one saw every day. It was outrageous that a family man of forty or so had to submit his most intimate letters to a snotty-nosed whipper-snapper, who received a commission after a farcical interview and a few weeks in a cadet school.

In the middle of December we went into the trenches again and took over some waterlogged ditches north-east of Ypres. The conditions were appalling and a number of men went down the line with frozen feet, known as "trench feet." One of the victims took off his boots one



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night and stood with his bare feet in the freezing water for several hours. Next morning his feet were effectively frozen and he chuckled with glee that he was finished with the war. His prophecy came true, for he lost both legs amputated below the knee. At night our position was as dreary as one could well conceive. The flares lit up the lakes that surrounded our little islands, the wind souged and moaned in a clump of shattered trees behind us, rain dripped from the leaves, black clouds swollen with rain hung overhead, and deposited their contents on us every few hours. Some of the men seemed devoid of imagination; but to a contemplative spirit the utter melancholy was at times almost unbearable. How many times did I repeat to myself at night that the war could not last much longer, simply to avoid blowing out my brains in a fit of depression!

The swollen corpses lying out in front were punctured by bullets or burst spontaneously and sent over the vilest of stinks. When Jerry shelled us heavily it was impossible to get the wounded away before night, and many of them were drowned in the mud and water that covered all the low ground and filled the holes. One night Bill Harker and I were holding a mound and he kept sticking up his arm to get a blighty one. Nothing happened and he stood up in full view of the enemy who were only about fifty yards distant. He got more than a blighty, he got a bullet through the head and dropped without a sound. Next day the chaplain was sent for, to read the burial service over six men lying where we had carried them in a wood behind the trenches. He came in a blue funk, gabbled the service and cleared off as fast as he could. We never saw him in the line except in a very quiet sector, on a very quiet day, when he ventured as far as the supports, talked what the men termed "bloody rot," gave away a few cigarettes and disappeared as soon as a shell burst within earshot.

One night Jerry thought we were going to attack owing to machine-gun and artillery activity, which were merely to divert his attention from a raid on the left. He sent up dozens of coloured flares and then we said our prayers.

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Shells of all sizes rained on us and blew our flimsy fortifications to fragments. The mud heaved and came over us in showers like waves from an angry sea. I had no shelter, and, as the high velocity shells screamed and burst all round, I lay on my face clutching my rifle and prayed that I might be spared. I promised, as I often did in extreme danger, to lead a better life and work for God if He would spare me. I did not really believe in a beneficent paternal God but I reasoned that it was just possible the parsons were right, and even if He didn't exist there was no harm done. It was Pascal's famous bet over again. Other men may have prayed for other reasons, but in my own case it was because I was paralysed with terror and on the verge of insanity. I believe that to pray for safety in the midst of danger is to ask for the suspension of natural laws; it would be as foolish to expect a brick from a roof to remain suspended in mid-air instead of dropping on a good man's head and killing him. As Winwood Reade says in his "Martyrdom of Man," "All phenomena, physical and moral, are subject to laws as invariable as those which regulate the rising and setting of the sun. It is in reality as foolish to pray for rain or a fair wind as it would be to pray that the sun should set in the middle of the day. It is as foolish to pray for the healing of a disease or for daily bread as it is to pray for rain or a fair wind. It is as foolish to pray for a pure heart or for mental repose as it is to pray for help in sickness or misfortune. All the events which occur upon the earth result from Law: even those actions which are entirely dependent on the caprices of the memory, or the impulse of the passions, are shown by statics to be, when taken in the gross, entirely independent of the human will."

One old regular was telling me that in December, 1914, he was about half a mile from the position we were holding towards the end of 1915. He was completely disillusioned and did nothing but curse the weather, lice, and lack of rum. He didn't seem to mind the danger, that was part of his job. At the height of the strafe he was lying at my side chewing a quid, when a shell hit him clean in the back,

failed to explode, but buried him under the mud, where he still lies as far as I know.

Gradually the shelling ceased and we were able to carry and drag the wounded to comparative safety. After eight days of hell we were relieved and went back to billets, having lost half of our men. Our Lieutenant had gone, on promotion I believe; and the new captain, Thornton, although not as bad as his predecessor, wanted to earn a name for efficiency and drilled the men as if they were raw recruits. They worked like niggers for twelve hours every day, and had to practise advancing under fire in a muddy field, which meant flopping flat every few yards. I was given another spell of clerical work and had an office in a hut built of ammunition boxes. In the adjoining hut was the sergeants' mess, and one day, as I was writing a report, I heard Sergeant Tuffton singing next door. A few minutes later Thornton rushed into my room and asked me if I had seen Tuffton. I replied that he was next door for I had heard him singing there. The irate captain strode out and barged into the mess, for I heard him shout: "What the hell are you doing here dodging work? Why are you not chasing the men? Either you ginger them up or I'll ginger you. No wonder the men skulk away in corners when the N.C.O.s show them the way. I'll have you stripped before long, damn me if I don't."

Tuffton was a most efficient sergeant and a capable leader. He replied in a firm voice: "I came here to make out a report for my platoon commander." Then he lost his temper and roared: "You bloody monkey, how dare you insult me? I'm not accustomed to taking orders from swine with twelve months' service. In civil life you would be selling matches in the gutter or touting for a bookie; call yourself a soldier? You are driving the men like galley-slaves and treating them worse than dogs so that you will receive some commendation. Thank God I'm going back to my own battalion to-morrow where there are soldiers, not measly bastards like you."

Thornton, like most bullies, was easily cowed, and retreated to consider the position. After a short time he

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came to me and said in an angry tone: "Saint-Mandé, I want you to give evidence against Sergeant Tuffton, who is under arrest, charged with insubordination and using threatening language to a superior officer."

I replied that if I gave evidence it would be on behalf of Tuffton who had in the first instance been grossly insulted by a superior officer. The sergeant-major, who hated Thornton, came in at that moment and advised him to wash out the charge, as several sergeants claimed to have heard the provocation and wished to give evidence on behalf of their comrade. Thornton came to us from some swell mob at home and was an inefficient fool, in the colonel's bad books, and dared not risk a case, as the battalion commander and Tuffton had served together in India. In addition the sergeant had a fine record, had won the D.C.M. for conspicuous gallantry, and was well spoken of by his own officers.

In the end the charge was dropped, but I lost my cushy job the same day. That evening Tuffton and I celebrated the discomfiture of Thornton in a little *estaminet* where we drank beer mixed with cognac. Thornton was one of the crowd who got promotion in England, knew nothing about fighting and came out to command men who knew their job from A to Z. During our next spell in the line he funked some job the colonel had given him and was sent home in disgrace. The mess servants were listening outside the door when the battalion commander called him a bloody coward, and told him he ought to be shot.

On Christmas Eve, six of us decided to have a celebration in an *estaminet* about ten kilometres distant, where the beer was not quite so watery as in the other places. The piano was an attraction, and I suggested bringing Sampson as an old pal of mine, and because of his musical talent. One or two demurred but I pointed out that off parade was not the same as on, and that to refuse the company of a decent fellow merely because he was a private seemed to me absurd. Finally I gained my point and we set out with rum in our water-bottles in order to put a kick into the beer. We monopolized the room with the piano and in a short time were exceedingly merry. When

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Sampson was singing a song someone poured a glass of beer down his neck and then we poured a bottle into the piano to oil it. Toasts were numerous and I proposed "Absent Friends," which was drunk in silence. All of us had lost pals and realized that we could not, with normal luck, survive many more attacks. The drink made us rather sentimental, and I recited :

" They are passed as a slumber that passes,  
As the dew of a dawn of old time ;  
More frail than the shadows on glasses,  
More fleet than a wave or a rhyme.  
As the waves after ebb drawing seaward,  
When their hollows are full of the night  
So the birds that flew singing to me-ward  
Recede out of sight."

We had songs galore and Sampson at the piano was voted a great success. Sergeant Mills, who had a good tenor voice, was in good form, and was warmly applauded for a fine rendering of " Till the sands of the desert grow cold."

Mills finished up with a sand dance executed with terrific vigour. Green, a big corporal, did a dance on the table until knocked off by someone who wanted to make a speech. Two burly sergeants exhibited their talents in a fandango, the remainder beating time with their hands. The climax was reached when we sat round the table singing a ditty with a rollicking chorus. Catching hold of the legs, we beat time with it on the floor, and sent all the glasses and bottles flying. Sampson was having an argument with an ex-lawyer's clerk and held him firmly by the arm while he solemnly recited :

" A fox may steal your hens, sir,  
A whore your health and pence, sir,  
Your daughter rob your chest, sir,  
Your wife may steal the rest, sir,  
A thief your goods and plate,  
But this is all but picking ;  
With rest, pence, chest and chicken,  
It ever was decreed, sir,  
If lawyer's hand is fee'd, sir,  
He steals your whole estate."

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Green gave an exhibition of Indian-club swinging with two bottles, when one flew through the window, and the other into a mirror. At the same instant there was a violent explosion in the piano and pieces of a Mills bomb were scattered about the room. Some private in the next room had taken the pin out of a bomb, opened the door and dropped it in the piano, of which the top was open. It was a miracle that nobody was wounded; the piano was shattered.

While we were inspecting the damage the door opened and the local militia marched in. They were ancient whiskered loons with beards and badly fitting uniforms. I told the landlord we would pay for the damage, but he was adamant, and the police sergeant, or whatever he was, told me we were under arrest, and would have to go to prison. Green was inciting the others to resist, but I pointed out the folly of such a course, for we were unarmed, and the gendarmes all had revolvers. I am convinced we could have floored them, for they were a decrepit lot, blinking and afflicted with titubations, due no doubt to having celebrated Christmas Eve.

We were marched off to the village lock-up, a dilapidated place with four cells in a yard. The guard-room or charge room was in front and there our boots were removed, after which we were locked up, two in each cell. Mills was with me and we discussed the probable consequences of our escapade. It was a serious matter, and we would at least be reduced to the ranks and sentenced to imprisonment or Field Punishment. The loss of rank did not worry me, but it was a serious matter for the regulars whose careers might be ruined. The gravity of the situation sobered Mills and quietly he tried the door. To our amazement it opened and we saw a bunch of keys hanging from the lock. From the gendarmes' room came sounds of a carousal, and it was evident they were continuing the celebrations which our arrest had interrupted. We set to work as noiselessly as possible, and in a few minutes had liberated all our comrades. Sampson was fairly sober and when I whispered how we had found the keys, he blinked and muttered: "*Quandoque bonus dormitat Homerus.*" I was

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going to sneeze when I remembered that pressure on the upper lip would stop it, and pressed my finger there just in time. Mills stood on my back and reached the top of the wall which was about eight feet high. One by one the others were hauled up and dropped down in the field on the other side.

We had a rough trip across fields and ditches bare-footed, but reached billets before dawn, where the Q.M.S. fitted us with boots before *réveillé*, and gladdened our hearts with the news that after breakfast we were to pack and go up the line that night. The chances of detection were small, for thousands of troops were quartered near the scene of our escape, and it would have been like looking for a needle in a haystack.

We marched for ten hours and at dusk took over a section of trenches south of Ypres. The vile weather continued, and the discomforts a repetition of what we had endured elsewhere. Eight of us sat with our chins on our knees in a wet dug-out. A blanket soaked in chemicals was hanging in the aperture and made the inside as black as pitch.

"Strike a bloody light, someone," growled a youth who had been a butcher's assistant.

"You'll get all the muckin' light you want an' more when we get a five-nine through the roof," answered a voice opposite.


"Ah, Butcher," roared another, "let's bring in a bloody German an' cut the b—— up for supper."

Butcher had been boasting of his skill in cutting up carcasses, and the others wanted to see him practise on one of the dead bodies lying all round.

"Shut up, for Christ's sake," wailed a carpenter who spent his spare time carving souvenirs; "can't we try to forget 'em for a bit?"

"Bloody funny all the same to think that most of us will be lying black and slimy before long. The b——s we smell from the trench were in civvies not so long ago, with smart clothes and coloured socks, now they're feedin' the bloody rats," and the speaker laughed hysterically. His nerves had gone and he ought to have been sent away. He was killed the next afternoon when a shell blew his legs off.

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One of the men lit a bit of four-by-two stuck in a tin of paraffin, and a faint light lit up the faces of the men sitting in the middle of the shelter, leaving the corners in darkness. The men's faces looked distorted and savage; their equipment hung from pegs in the earthen walls, and cigarette ends, jam-tins, paper, and match-sticks littered the floor. We smoked and spat while Jock picked up an old newspaper in which was announced a shortage of shells in Germany. When he finished reading it Jerry started to strafe us and for over an hour the shelling was intense. The big ones roared, the little ones screamed, and the earth shook and trembled under the shocks. "Have yer made yer will, Butcher?" cried Jock, as a burst near the doorway blew out the light and sent the blanket flying on top of us. The tin sheets on the roof were sagging in the middle and earth rained on our heads. "Oh, go ter hell," snarled Butcher, shaking with terror. "No need to go there, we've got one right here," laughed Jock nervously, and put his fingers in his ears.

It seemed as if every shell was missing our shelter by inches, and although wounded were crying for help we crouched where we were, too terrified to go out. I pressed myself close to the wall and was sweating with fear. In the middle of it all I was tossed up and down, a great weight pressed me down and I fainted.

When I came round I recalled the concussion, the collapse of the dug-out and the groans of the wounded. As soon as darkness came on a rescue party set to work and dug us out. Jock and Butcher were dead, Sampson and four others were wounded, I alone, by some extraordinary freak of chance, was uninjured save for shock and cuts from the tin sheet and boards that had been pressing on my legs. Sampson was only slightly hit in the thigh and back, and laughed at the prospect of a rest. "Pity poor old Jock went west," he grumbled; "the b—— owed me ten francs."

"The Germans are short of shells," exclaimed a man with a bandaged head, "they've more shells than we've tins of bloody bully."

We had two more spells of eight days in the front line



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and then heard that we were going over the top once more. Gas-cylinders had been placed again in the front-line parapet, and the object was to capture a piece of rising ground in front that enabled Jerry to dominate the plain and fire on the roads. The attack was to take place at dawn after artillery preparation. At three in the morning the sky behind us lit up with ten thousand flashes, and the noise was so great that we had to shout to pass a message to a man a yard away. Jerry sent up his S.O.S. and we were drenched in steel. Coloured lights were shooting up on all sides, and shells burst in front, behind, overhead, and even under our feet with sheets of flame, bitter fumes and shattering crashes. The gas-men hid in a dug-out and one had to be threatened with a revolver before he would come out. Telephone wires were hanging in festoons all over the trench, and as the sides fell in we had to crawl away to avoid burial. Some of the gas-men could not discharge their cylinders, and it would have been better if the damn things had been left behind, for the gas hissed out and lay a few yards in front of the trench.

Confusion reigned supreme. Splinters were whipping up the mud all round and machine-guns were sweeping our parapet, or what was left of it. The wire in front of the enemy trenches was mostly uncut, and we knew the attack was doomed to failure. When the whistle sounded we funked it and crouched in the trench. The platoon commander and sergeant alone jumped up and were at once riddled with bullets. The captain came along with blood on his face, brandishing his revolver and shot a man who was grovelling at his feet. I dashed over the top ashamed of my cowardice and a handful of men followed me. Most of them dropped, but with two survivors I reached a shell-hole near the German wire and lay there up to our waists in water. The wire was intact and our dead were lying in heaps. Our own gas had accounted for some of them, and I pulled off my mask determined to be gassed rather than suffocated.

We lay there all day sniping at the German trench, and crawled back at night to our half-obliterated holes. The smell of blood, high explosive, gas, and excrement from a

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demolished latrine made me vomit and I felt the end was near. At dawn Jerry attacked and we fired until our rifles were almost too hot to hold. Reinforcements had been sent up, but had suffered such severe losses that the enemy broke into the trench at several points, and sniped any head that showed up above the shallow ditches. In the middle of the pandemonium the captain gave me a message for battalion H.Q. and shouted to get through at all costs. The shells were screaming and shooting into the ground which vomited boards, wire, and corpses.

As a tremendous burst on my left threw me off my feet I dashed back, running in zig-zags, in the hope of presenting a more difficult target. What was about a quarter of a mile seemed a Marathon. I felt a blow on the head and blood poured into my eyes so that I tripped over some wire and fell headlong. Stumbling to my feet I dashed on, and, a few yards further on, fell into a huge shell-hole full of fumes and quite fresh. I reflected vaguely that if I had not tripped over the wire I should have been blotted out, and kept on running. A shell burst behind me and a flat splinter hit me in the backside, burning and stinging like blazes. However I could still run, although the blood running down my legs made me feel faint and I collapsed as I fell down into the H.Q. dug-out. Whisky revived me and I was able to answer questions about the state of the company front. The colonel advised me to go and get my wounds attended to at the dressing-station, and I needed no second bidding.

I don't know if I was suffering from what was termed shell-shock but my nerves were in a bad way, and I trembled at every burst in the vicinity. The dressing-station was about a mile away and I died a thousand deaths before getting there. The M.O. wiped the blood from my head and assured me it was nothing but a superficial scalp wound. "As for your back, you will not sit in comfort for a few weeks, but that also is not dangerous and will soon heal," he said with a laugh.

I was again inoculated against tetanus and evacuated to a small hospital on a hill about twenty miles back. It was a monastery, half of which had been commandeered for

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the wounded. All was peaceful and the chanting of the monks like balm to a bruised soul. We lay in a large airy room, fifty broken men. At first I was bitterly disappointed when I realized I was not bound for England, but felt intense relief to lie in a clean bed out of danger, after the ghastly nightmare I had been through. A man near me who came in the next day told me my company was practically wiped out. A mine had exploded under them and the survivors were all killed or taken prisoners. His tale was very incoherent, for he had been so terrified and dazed that he had nothing beyond vague impressions. He remembered the sergeant crying: "Come on, you bloody cowards!" when the cowed men hesitated before throwing away their lives in the hail of steel that swept their parapet. Orders had been given that the wounded were to be left, but in spite of that my neighbour stayed in a hole with a pal who had been shot through both lungs and coughed up his blood until he died. The gas blew back on them and Jerry simply mowed them down as they rushed forward over No Man's Land. He was loud in his praise of Harries, a medical officer, who exposed himself time and again to attend to the wounded, and was shot through the head while bandaging an officer who had lost half an arm.

The attack appeared to have been bungled in every way, and to this day I cannot understand why it should have taken place at all. The wind was not favourable for gas, the enemy wire was uncut, he was able to sweep the open ground so effectively that nothing could live, and hundreds of lives were thrown away in vain. The recuperative powers and resistance of the human animal are amazing, but there is a limit. I have seen mere boys facing death day and night, joking and playing cards within a hundred yards of the enemy, and when mortally wounded asking for a cigarette and going over the Styx without a moan. A little more than a year before they had been at school, driving carts, selling newspapers and doing all manner of jobs which are anything but war-like. Within a few months they faced the finest troops in Europe and held their own. Thrown into the furnace again and again they were broken at last, and called cowardly bastards when

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they realized the futility of rushing against the storm of steel in which no man could live.

One man named Sims had been in a dug-out under which the Germans were mining and the pick taps were distinctly audible. The platoon sergeant asked permission to evacuate the place, but it was in the front line, and they were told it had to be held, and that there was no immediate danger. "I knew we were for it," said Sims. "As we went up the line singing and joking I pulled a little packet of salt out of my pocket and it spilt on the ground. Then the b——s we were relieving kept asking us if we had made our wills, for Jeiry was mining and they knew it was going up soon. The sergeant sent me again with a message as soon as the pick taps stopped, but I stopped one in my bloody shoulder and while I was lying on a stretcher the mine went up and not a b—— escaped." The speaker had a broken shoulder and a twisted knee.

My wounds healed rapidly and in a month I was able to walk about. In a bed near me was a middle-aged Cockney with walrus whiskers. He was a taciturn individual but sometimes would bawl out: "What did you do in the Great War, daddy?" Then he vouchsafed to anyone who might be listening that he was a bloody fool to chuck up a good job, thirty bob a week, and all found. He had been a barman and expatiated on the respective qualities of his various wares. Prospective toppers were informed that a little olive oil before a drinking bout would keep them fairly sober. The barman cursed with refreshing vigour three times a day, as regularly as he took his meals. He was a good soldier and had won the Military Medal, but loved a good grouse. He would march and fight to the last gasp in spite of his terrible curses against the army, the officers, and the quartermaster-sergeant. A tall muscular fellow used to stand on his bed and argue with a diminutive youth four beds from him. The muscular one had been a labourer in the building trade and had suffered much from unemployment. He tried to convince the youth that all working men had the same interests and were nothing but bloody fools to kill each other. "I got a pound a week when I was working, and when it rained,

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nothing. On that I 'ad to keep a wife and five kids. Suppose the mucking Germans come, I've got b—— all to lose and will be no worse off, probably better. Why should I fight to keep the profiteer safe? If I'm killed or crippled, wot will 'appen to my family? Live like bloody paupers. That's wot 'appened ter my ole man in the Boer War. Reservist 'e was. Got enteric an' lorst 'is sight. The gentleman in khaki who was ordered south is sellin' matches to-day, an' 'as been for thirteen years, listenin' ter bitches in silk, who 'ave sold their bodies fer diamonds, say with a sneer as they pass: 'These beggars are a positive nuisance; it ought not to be allowed.' An' the same will 'appen after this war, only a damn sight worse. The rich who bleated to us 'Your king an' your country both need you so,' an' who promised ter make a 'ell of a fuss of us when we come back, do they mean it? Them who come back will be slaves again, for we are wage slaves while we yell that Britons never will be slaves. The shirkers will 'ave the good jobs an' a good many of us will be told we're not wanted, and . . ."

But the other fellows had put up with enough and roared a chorus that was mainly a repetition of "Sit down, you fool," and "O my, what a rotten song, what a rotten singer too!" The orator tried to continue, waved his arms and shouted like mad, but it was useless and he subsided on to the bed and was soon playing cards.

A little fat man in an adjoining bed had just finished a story and started another. He spent most of his time telling yarns to a group of walking cases sitting round his bed. He was a good raconteur and had a marvellous power of changing his voice, gesture and grimace. His face was like a flaming sun with a lot of wrinkles round the eyes. He had just returned from leave, and in response to numerous requests told a story of what he alleged happened to him during his visit to Britain. It was as follows:

"I went on leave last month and arrived safely in London after travelling in cattle-trucks. The poor officers grumbled at having to travel in third-class carriages and missed their servants. One of them tried to make me carry a bundle for him and I told him I'd see him in hell first.

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It was getting dark, and while he was racing round looking for somebody to put me under arrest I pinched his bundle and cleared off. It contained nothing but lousy washing so I threw it away on the line. Imagine my joy at finding myself in the smoke again with plenty of pretty girls and real beer! Well, after buying my ticket for Bristol I went to a pub near Paddington and had a hell of a fine time with a number of fellows also on leave. In the middle of a rollicking chorus I looked at the clock, and saw that it was a quarter to eight and my train was at eight that evening. I just had time to buy a bottle of whisky, hop into a taxi, and shout: 'Hell for leather for Paddington station!' The driver responded nobly, and I caught my train with about five seconds to spare. Squeezing into a compartment I found myself among six profiteers smoking cigars and playing poker. They glared at me and resented my intrusion, so I muttered that my diphtheria could not be so bad when I was allowed to travel to hospital by train, with the result that in a twinkling I had the carriage to myself. The bloated curs were running no risks and even left a pack of cards behind, with which I told my fortune, and saw that I had to beware of a red-headed woman; also that I was going a journey and would receive money in a five. I pulled down the blinds and got beautifully drunk on the first whisky I had tasted for months.

"The train rolled on and on; darkness had thrown its mantle over meadow and mansion. Soon nothing was visible save the twinkling lights of villages that swirled by from time to time, and clusters of sparks from the engine hanging among the trees like fairy lanterns. So we rolled on hour after hour with nothing to break the monotony except my bottle which was empty all too soon. As I lay stretched out on the seat the rhythmic clanking of the wheels lulled me to sleep, and I woke feeling cold and stiff. I had lost my watch and had no idea of time, but it seemed to me we were taking a long time to reach Bristol. I stared out of the window, sometimes looking into the silvery waters of a placid river flowing under a bridge. Then a cottage would swim into my

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ken with lighted windows, and I wondered if they were just going to bed or just getting up; or whether it was sickness, even death, for tragedy comes to the lonely cottage even as to the city dwellings. Perhaps their boy had been killed in France and the mother had collapsed, who will ever know? After hours that seemed interminable I realized we were approaching a great city; the train started to slow up and coloured hoardings flashed past the windows. A long black board with white letters came into view, and to my horror the letters spelt 'Glasgow'! Just try to appreciate my predicament. Hundreds of miles from home and eight bob in my pocket! It was indeed a case of fed-up, mucked up and far from bleeding home. The platform was almost deserted, but I found an official who told me the proper form to fill up in order to make a complaint.

"Snow was falling thick and fast, covering the big ugly city with a fairy mantle, and making prostitutes look like angels. After much tramping I reached an hotel in a side street which looked disreputable enough to be cheap. A ring at the door brought no reply, so I knocked with my rifle butt until the echoes resounded through the gaunt old place. It was the sort of place murders are committed in. After a bit I heard steps which gradually came nearer and many bolts were withdrawn. The door opened and the owner or night porter asked what I wanted with a most suspicious stare. He was the least attractive person I've ever seen, with a face like a twisted boot badly patched. He wore a shade over one eye and scars across chin and cheek bone. The nose had been broken and remained flat. He had a wooden leg, and looked like a retired pirate. Much as I disliked the look of the place and the man, I was too tired to seek elsewhere, and asked him if he had a room. He countered by asking me how much money I had. He seemed to hypnotize me, and although I wanted to take to my heels I was unable to move. I replied that I had five shillings, and he said there was a bedroom on the top floor at that price.

"We climbed up a staircase that seemed endless; I counted five hundred steps and then lost count. It was

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like climbing up into a lighthouse; the stairs were bare, dirty and in a bad state of repair. At last we reached the top landing, and, pointing to a door, the fellow stumped away, his wooden leg sounding on the stairs long after the sound of his shoe had died away. There was a gas-jet at the end of the passage but nothing in the room. I remembered a one-legged man who unscrewed his leg and murdered people with it, and, the more I thought of it, the more I was convinced that the dark marks I had seen on walls were bloodstains.

"The furniture in my room was scanty and of the poorest quality. However, I could not retreat, and, hanging my jacket behind the door, I lay down on the dirty creaking bed and tried to sleep. I had just dozed off when my blood froze, my heart beat madly, and my hair stood on end. The most unearthly groans and wails reached my ears, but try as I would I could not locate them; they seemed to float about the room, coming in one window and going out another. Then I remembered that a pal at the front to whom I owed money said he would come and haunt me if he got killed before I paid him. I kept putting off payment until the big attack, for I knew he was unlucky and sure enough he went west. I was superstitious and lay there with big beads of sweat on my forehead. At last I could stand it no longer and groped round the room for my matches, which I heard fall to the floor. I failed to find them but put my hand on the lighted stump of a cigarette that I had thrown away.

"With craven fear gnawing at my vitals I crept out into the corridor and there the scene was even more ghostly. A fresh breeze was blowing in through the window at the far end, and the gas flame jumped in the most eerie way. The shadows on the walls danced up and down, to and fro, now high, now low. They were like the inhabitants of the lower regions stretching out their long thin arms and hands for me; they laughed silently at the sight of a man frozen with fear.

"It then became clear that the groans and lamentations were coming from the room opposite mine. The door of that room, which was marked No. 13, was ajar, and I felt



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very tempted to walk in and investigate. But the voice was that of a woman and it was a serious matter to be caught in a strange woman's room at night. Once again I went to my room and tried to sleep but it was quite impossible. Goaded to desperation I walked to the strange room and knocked at the door; there was no reply. My patience at an end, I stepped inside, and what did I see? Kneeling beside her bed was a beautiful young lady. She was partly undressed and her perfect figure was gleaming in silken underwear, while the shapely legs from ankle to thigh were sheathed in the finest silk stockings." (Here the listeners' eyes glistened, they moistened their lips and fidgeted uneasily.) "There was some terrible mystery in the room, some foul crime had been committed; some great wrong was being perpetrated. I had been sent by providence to rescue the innocent damsel from the perils that beset her, to save her honour, win her love perhaps; stranger things have happened. Perhaps her father was a millionaire and would settle a million on us to enable us to marry.

"I read once of a rich girl, daughter of an earl, marrying a porter, so why should I not win a rich bride, humble as I was? I approached her quietly, touched her on the soft white shoulder and began: 'Excuse me, madame, is there anything I . . . ' but with one athletic bound she reached the door, locked it, put the key in her pocket, and rasped in a cold, hard, metallic voice: 'Give me £500 or I ring and have you arrested for breaking into my room at night!'

"Picture the scene, friends! There was I at three in the morning, locked up in a room with a lady who had nothing on beyond her pants and stockings! I thought of my wife and children and trembled. I saw my fair name dragged in the mire and the prison gates yawning before me; my senses reeled. I pleaded with the woman, but she would not yield an inch nor come down a penny. With tears in my eyes I told her I was a poor man and all I had in the world was in my jacket behind the door of my room. Warning me that if I played any tricks I should be sorry she unlocked the door, went out, and disappeared

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inside my room. Like a flash I sprang in after her, locked the door and cried triumphantly: 'Now, into bed with me or I ring and have you arrested for breaking into my room!'

"She turned pale, implored me to be merciful, embraced my knees and said she would get into bed with me at once. She stripped and put her hands on my shoulders" (the listeners clasped their hands, craned their necks, and prepared to enjoy to the full what was coming). "The hands on my shoulders grew heavier and I opened my eyes to find the guard shaking me and bawling in my ear: 'Come on, my lad, we've been in Bristol ten minutes and we don't go any further!'"

The breathless group round the bed, released from the spell, roared with laughter, and a rather slow-witted youth said, as he scratched his head: "Well, I'm b——d! It was all a dream and you never saw the tart undressed at all."

There was a little summer-house in the monastery grounds under some trees, and I obtained permission to sleep there; it gave me much more liberty, and I had made up my mind to explore the village as soon as possible. One night the rain dripped from the leaves, and picking up an old volume of Buffon I came upon the following passage:

*Je goûte du plaisir quand il pleut à verse, que je vois les vieux murs moussus tout dégouttants d'eau, et que j'entends les murmures des vents qui se mêlent aux bruissements de la pluie. Ces bruits mélancoliques me jettent, pendant la nuit, dans un doux et profond sommeil. Je ne suis pas le seul homme sensible à ces affections. Pline parle d'un consul romain qui faisait dresser, lorsqu'il pleuvait, son lit sous le feuillage d'un arbre, afin d'entendre frémir les gouttes de pluie et de s'endormir à leur murmure.*

*Je ne sais à quelle loi physique les philosophes peuvent rapporter les sensations de la mélancolie. Pour moi, je trouve que ce sont les affections de l'âme les plus voluptueuses. 'La mélancolie est friande,' dit Michel Montaigne. Cela vient, ce me semble, de ce qu'elle satisfait à la fois les deux*

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*puissances dont nous sommes formés, le corps et l'âme, le sentiment de notre misère et celui de notre existence.*

*Si je suis triste, et que je ne veuille pas étendre mon âme si loin, je goûte encore du plaisir à me laisser aller à la mélancolie que m'inspire le mauvais temps. Il me semble alors que la nature se conforme à ma situation, comme une tendre amie. Elle est d'ailleurs toujours si intéressante, sous quelque aspect qu'elle se montre, que, quand il pleut, il me semble voir une belle femme qui pleure. Elle me paraît d'autant plus belle qu'elle me semble plus affligée.*

The monks were singing in the chapel and the music floated clear and melancholy in the evening air. How I envied their peaceful lives and religious fervour! I felt like Faust, with the cup to his lips, listening to the chorus of angels. I also had been accustomed from infancy to those sweet religious harmonies; I thought of my parents and my depravity, and longed for the faith that had gone for ever. I felt I was the plaything of fate, and that men were the products of environment and heredity. Free will was an illusion, good and evil were conventional terms, and nothing mattered. Then I realized that Hegel was right when he said that all is determined, but we must act as if we are free agents.

Next evening after some rain the sky cleared, and a bird high overhead thrilled me with its melody as I sat on a rustic seat, watching the warm glow that suffused the western sky long after the sun had set.

To the east, as darkness fell, one saw the first pale rockets shoot up into the air, and the red flashes of guns and bursting shells. A dog-fight was taking place in the air near Ypres, and the aeroplanes turned and manœuvred with their machine-guns barking furiously; the machines looked like leaves blown about by a gusty wind. I sat in a brown study, fascinated by the lights, and watching shrapnel bursting over cross-roads congested with troops and transport. I had a splendid pair of binoculars, taken from the body of a German officer, and spent much of my time watching things of interest near the trenches. When shells burst on roads, the men marching

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in little compact groups fled like ants, and some dark objects were left lying on the road; they were men who had been hit.

An orderly came and handed me some letters. There was one from home, one from Sampson, one from Jean, and two or three from strangers. My people were glad I was out of the fighting and wanted to know if nothing could be done to get me home. They had had a great shock, for a man who saw me fall and who knew their address wrote that I had been killed.

Jean's attitude puzzled me. We corresponded fairly regularly but she no longer mentioned marriage and seemed to be having a gay time in London. I felt somewhat hurt, but reasoned that one could not expect her to live like a hermit because there was a war on. Her letters varied in the most extraordinary manner. Sometimes they were full of joy and referred to our walks and love; at others they were short impersonal notes containing hardly anything beyond polite greetings and wishes for a speedy recovery.

When I opened one of the strange letters I had a shock that numbed my senses. It was from a chaplain in a base hospital informing me of Sampson's death. The paper fell from my hands and I stared at the distant ruins, vacantly, like a man deprived of his reason. Then a man came and spoke to me, asking me if I would go and play cards. I replied that I wished to be alone, and walked away, after picking up my letters that were lying on the ground. In a quiet corner, sheltered by trees, I sat with my head in my hands, until the first overwhelming shock had subsided somewhat. Then I said savagely: "What the hell does it matter, anyway? We've all got to go some time or other, so why should a few months or years make such a difference? Those of us who escape will be so disillusioned and dead spiritually that we might as well be dead. A little love, a little striving for wealth or power, petty hates and jealousies, and then the grave. The last years for the majority will be racked with pain until the tomb brings release from the torment, and eternal oblivion."

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The padre wrote that Sampson had been very severely wounded in the body and legs while being carried down to the dressing-station. It was feared from the first that he could not live so his legs were not amputated, although it would have been necessary to do so to save his life had he been able to survive the operation. Injections were given from time to time to deaden the pain and he gradually sank and died. A photograph of the grave was enclosed.

Sampson's letter ran as follows:

*When you receive this I shall have gone west, for although they try to keep the truth from me I realize I'm a goner. It is curious that I survived the journey down, for my legs were shattered, and there is a deep body wound that they try to drain with tubes, but it is too deep, and I know from the pain that sepsis is setting in. I hope the end will come quickly, for the pain is almost unbearable, and I cannot sleep. We have had some good times together and some bad ones. My wife will be informed in due course that I died like a hero. How absurd it all seems! We lie in holes shooting men in the back if no other part of their body is visible, bombing them when invisible, blowing them up at all times, and poisoning them with gas when the wind is favourable. And of course they do the same to us. It all involves great courage of a kind, but we ought to refrain from boasting about it and thinking about it as a glorious achievement.*

*I doubt if the legend of war's glory will ever die. When this one is over some spasmodic and half-hearted attempts will be made to promote a better understanding between the nations of Europe, but gradually the old order will re-establish itself and the terms of peace will inevitably sow the seeds of the next war. I would like the shirts we threw off in the brewery to be kept and supplied to any youth who may think of war as a glorious lark. If he can stand a thousand lice biting him day and night without losing his enthusiasm, make him lie in a hole in the garden in winter exposed to rain, hail, snow and frost. While he lies there, shoot, bomb, and gas him. Then take him to the operating theatre of any large hospital and make him watch the amputating of limbs. Then get him to publish his impressions for the benefit of*

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his generation. The trouble is that the horrors which are the inevitable concomitant of war are carefully hushed up, and women hand out white feathers to those who refuse to take part in the slaughter because they dislike the idea of murdering their fellow-men.

And yet of course war is sometimes forced upon a peace-loving nation, and then there is no option but fighting to the bitter end. We both appreciate the splendour of the courage, self-sacrifice, and comradeship, of those who gave up everything to obey what they took to be the call of duty. It would be interesting to know how many men enlisted from patriotic motives, and how many were tired of a humdrum existence that offered no excitement. A good many cowards like me joined up to escape hell in the shape of a wife. I would like to see the whole nation conscripted in time of war. We agree to undergo the most ghastly risks and discomforts for a shilling a day, while munition workers get five times that amount per hour.

You remember young D. who was shot for cowardice? He was barely eighteen and like many other fools had lied to enlist, leaving a widowed mother and several young brothers and sisters to the tender mercies of the state. He was an apprentice when he joined up, therefore his mother's pension, if she ever gets one, will be miserably small. That youngster did well until his nerve gave way, and he was shot like a felon while those who stay at home get imprisonment at worst, or pick cabbages and call it work of national importance. There should be not only conscription of bodies but of wealth. Why should it be legal to take a man's body (as they will as soon as compulsory service comes in), and put it in the living rampart that keeps the enemy from our country, while wealthy people hoard their money in banks and draw interest from shares, laughing at the state calling out for the sinews of war? Such an idea seems to me not socialism but common sense. When I think of the millions who will lie under the sod before it is over, the broken hearts and countless weeping mourners all over Europe, I think there must be a curse on humanity, and that if there is a God who created man and planned the universe, He must be a monster. And yet my argument is invalid, for as Hugo says :

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*Nous ne voyons jamais qu'un seul côté des choses ;  
L'autre plonge en la nuit d'un mystère effrayant.  
L'homme subit le joug sans connaître les causes.  
Tout ce qu'il voit est court, inutile et fuyant.*

We must just resign ourselves to live and suffer in absolute ignorance of our origin and destiny. The parson here is a decent fellow but his talk about eternal life leaves me cold. A religion that might be an instrument for good has been warped until it has become an abettor of social injustices and abuses, a mockery and an instrument for striking fear into the mob.

When we walked through the London slums and saw the painted prostitutes standing in corners offering their bodies for a few shillings, the stunted, diseased children, who had already learnt to steal and lie, the drunken, drug-saturated animals slinking down dark passages ; what a reflection on our so-called civilization ! There was only one Christian and He died on the cross ; the bishops, His alleged disciples, live in mansions, serving God and mammon.

As I said at the beginning, I am writing this in great pain and my ideas will probably seem incoherent. I am like a man with unbearable toothache, cursing and formulating his philosophy of life. We have to die some day, and in the vast eons of time our wretched little lives are as ephemeral as the ripples on a pond. My greatest regret is that a third of my life was made more bitter than any hell by the fierce religious terrors that were drummed into my ears. I loathed Sunday worse than death. The smug black-coated parson, like a great vulture, smirked while he robbed children of what should have been their happiest years. If you survive the war and have any children spare them what we had to endure. Tell them we know nothing about our origin and destiny, that death is simply a sleep from which we do not wake up in this world, and no one has ever returned to tell us if there is any other. Tell your son, when he asks, that he was conceived and grew inside his mother, that there is no shame attached to the sexual act and the birth of a child, as these horrible, canting, hypocritical, mean-souled prudes and Puritans would have us believe.

Fancy an eternity with such ghouls ! You used to say you would rather be in hell ; et moi aussi. We have spent

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some happy hours discussing the problems of life . . . although I think old Solon was right when he declared that no man can be called happy until he is dead. I have been reading some of his fragments and marvel that in these decadent times we have so completely lost sight of his great idea, that to inculcate moral precepts and practical wisdom is the most important duty.

I have a volume of Nietzsche here and it reminds me of our discussion that night when we expected to be buried or blown to atoms by the shells that fell as thick as hail. We were discussing Nietzsche's ideas concerning dangerous living, in that front-line dug-out, when they were shelling above and mining underneath. We certainly did not expect to survive and read the "Also sprach Zarathustra," while shell-bursts were constantly extinguishing the candle and sending lumps of earth and rubble flying about our ears.

I'm not sure that there isn't something in the central idea, that life becomes deadly and monotonous, even unbearable, unless we live dangerously, seek something higher and nobler than its inertia. When a man is chasing a girl he will go through fire and water for her; when she is his he will not leave his club for her. To-day I have been reading some pages of Arthur Schopenhauer and the following words remain in my mind: "The satisfaction of a wish ends it . . . the satisfaction is short and scantily measured out. It is like the alms thrown to a beggar, that keeps him alive to-day, that his misery may be prolonged till the morrow. We shall crave eternally without ever satisfying the yearnings of our hearts." Then I was able to get hold of Eduard von Hartmann's "Philosophie des Unbewussten," which appeals to my pessimism. Universal suicide is the only remedy for human ills, but we haven't the courage.

I enclose the address of A, who was shot for striking an officer, or rather an unmitigated skunk in officer's uniform. I promised to call and comfort his widow, and I know you will do so if you possibly can. May you be spared to see peace come again to this distracted world, to hear the song of the birds on the hills, and lie among the flowers, untroubled by the haunting fear of returning to trenches that stink of latrines and high-explosives. We often discussed the possi-



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bility of tramping the world, happy and poor, like Edwin Arnold's *Draper*, Shakespeare's *Autolycus* in rags and tatters, who loved to lie on his stomach among the foxgloves and ferns watching the little creatures in the grass, under the buttercup leaves and balls of the crow's-foot. May you be spared to hear the laughter of children round you, so that you may even enjoy moments when the present horrors fade from your memory. I have a pocket volume of Ovid here and shall close with a little quotation that seems appropriate in view of our present surroundings :

*Ultima semper*

*Expectanda dies homini, dicique beatus*

*Ante obitum nemo supremaque funera debet.*

Our friendship has been something very real and infinitely precious to me ; I know it has meant much to you also.

The letter ended with an affectionate farewell.

I felt as disconsolate as if I had lost a brother. The little pedagogue who quoted Latin and got drunk occasionally was a true friend, who would share his last crust and endure the severest hardships without whining. He often had a cheery word when the situation looked blackest, and was a true philosopher ; so good-natured that a wretched woman had made his home life unbearable. He used to say with a laugh that even the army was better than home.



## CHAPTER XIV

THE view from the hill was superb and I discovered that it was possible to reach the monastery roof by a trap-door over a ladder at the top of the stairs. One could see the trenches for miles, and I often went up on to my perch at night to smoke and watch the V<sup>é</sup>ry lights that rose, hovered, and fell, in an endless succession from dusk to dawn. Shrapnel shells burst in the air with red flashes that stabbed the darkness, and machine-guns tapped out their message of death for poor devils on patrols and wiring fatigues.

The monks went about their daily tasks as if the world were still at peace. They needed nothing from the outside world, wearing only a rough smock and sandals which they made themselves. Some toiled in the fields, others in the various workshops, doing wood and iron work necessary for the establishment. They marched into the chapel in groups of twenty, and the chant of the retiring choir was taken up by the new arrivals, so that day and night the sweet strains of musical voices praising God were heard in the chapel precincts. One is tempted to condemn such a mode of life as useless, and yet it may be more truly in harmony with the designs of the Architect of the Universe than the lives of men who sweat and strive to make money, working like horses and amusing themselves like monkeys in a way that is reminiscent of the mediæval dance of death. The intervals between wars are spent in paying for past conflicts and preparing for those of the future.

There was a tiny hamlet at the foot of the hill; a few cottages were on the lower slope, but most of them straggled on to the plain. I explored it and discovered an inn half hidden by climbing plants and ivy. The girl who ran the

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place was complaisant and we became good friends. Her parents were executed by the Germans in the Vosges. The enemy were badly scared one night, and there was much indiscriminate shooting on the part of the soldiers who had looted the *estaminets* and got out of hand. There were several wounded, and they alleged they had been fired on by *franc-tireurs*. Several civilians were put up against the wall and shot; their houses destroyed by fire. The girl who told me the story declared that her parents had no arms in the house and no shots were fired from it. The trial was a farce and lasted about ten minutes. The daughter, Marie Masson, fled in terror, but had been able to secure part of her father's fortune, with which she acquired the modest inn.

Marie told me of atrocities she had seen, and after making allowance for exaggeration I came to the conclusion that there had been much brutality on the part of the German troops, and that some innocent civilians had been shot. It is impossible to ascertain what provocation the enemy received, for naturally those who fired on them from windows will not usually confess their misdeeds. There is no doubt that the disciples of Bernhardt and Treitschke were brutal in their treatment of civilians. There is no doubt, also, that they received considerable provocation from fanatics who regarded them as savage beasts to be insulted as much as possible.

A friend of mine told me of a detestable little yahoo from Glasgow who was shot in a German prison camp by a Prussian sergeant-major. In England it was included among the atrocities, and no mention was made of the fact that the victim yelled out "Sale Boche" as the camp commandant passed near him. Marie escaped and made her way to Rouen, but was glad to get away from a place infested with troops. She told me of a girl at her hotel who gave birth to a child whose father was Chinese. She told me also of the "war babies" in her village, a couple of whom were brown.

We spent many happy hours in the sitting-room behind the bar. Customers were few and we often played chess for a whole afternoon without being disturbed. I believed

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I still loved Jean, but the mode of life I was leading unsettled me and I craved for companionship, feminine society, and all that a pretty girl could give. Marie was not particularly pretty, but possessed a certain charm that was at times irresistible. She was what the French call "*une femme chic*" and fascinated me by her elegance. Her smile was roguish, her laugh infectious; every movement of her body cast a spell. She appeared to regard inn-keeping as a joke, and had made up her mind to abandon it after the war when she hoped to recover her property.

One evening she was standing on a chair attempting to reach some bottles on a shelf. She stretched but was too short. I gripped her slender ankles firmly and lifted her, for she was quite small and slender. Feeling herself lifted she gave a little cry of fear, crumpled up and put her arms round my neck. I kissed her passionately and she offered no resistance. We spent marvellously happy days in the cosy little sitting-room, reading poetry and sipping wine, while the storm raged outside. She told me a great deal of village gossip, for although few men called she supplied the women with cheap red or white wine and heard all the petty scandals.

Sometimes after serving a customer Marie would return quietly, and, putting her arms round my neck from behind, would whisper: "*Tu m'aimes bien, n'est-ce pas, mon chéri ?*"

One day in answer to such a question I replied: "*Je t'aime d'amour, ardemment, follement, désespérément, ma chouchoute,*" and Marie made me promise that as soon as the war was over I would come back to her. Even as I made the promise I realized full well it was nothing but a passing whim, and that I could never bury myself in a Vosges village, however restful and attractive.

From that day Marie showed that she was anxious to give herself to me; I could not be sure whether it was to prove her love or merely to satisfy her sex-impulse. In the trenches I yearned for such an opportunity with all the fervour of a strong and healthy frame. But when it

was offered I had scruples. It seemed dishonourable to have sexual intercourse with a girl whom one felt one would never see again, and my early education implanted in me a wholesome respect for virginity.

It was easy to absent myself from the hospital at night, for no one ever visited my little summer-house. The result was that I stayed later and later with Marie, until one evening she closed early and we celebrated her birthday. We drank old wine out of bottles covered with cobwebs, making merry, and gradually becoming less restrained in our caresses. The wine had gone to our heads and my companion whispered: "*Allons ne perdons plus de temps. Tu veux bien passer la nuit avec moi, n'est-ce pas, mon chéri ?*"

That night was the prelude to many others. I went to the inn after dark and left before dawn, so that the neighbours would not gossip. It was too idyllic to last, and at the end of the month I was marked fit, and told I must return to my regiment. We spent a last night together, prolonging our raptures until dawn. As I was leaving in the grey light of early morning Marie hugged and kissed me, then whispered: "*Adieu, mon petit soldat. Je t'aime bien, mais je ne te demande rien. Nous avons été heureux ensemble ; les jours de bonheur sont si rares dans la vie. Le sort t'a amené à ma porte. Nous sommes jeunes, nous nous sommes plus . . . nous garderons le souvenir de ces nuits délicieuses ;*

*'Un souvenir heureux est peut-être sur terre  
Plus vrai que le bonheur?'*

I found the battalion near Poperinghe ready to go into the line again. My old platoon contained five men I knew, the remainder were all new faces. There was some mail for me and the first card I looked at was from Soames, a quiet fellow whom I liked, but whom I did not know well on account of his reticence; however he was a decent comrade. He had sent me a field-service post card which might have got him into trouble if the postal authorities had been more alert. One side was as under :

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Nothing is to be written on this side except the date and signature of the sender. Sentences not required may be erased. If anything else is added the post card will be destroyed.

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~~I am quite well.~~ No bloody fear I'm not.

~~I have been admitted into hospital~~

~~sick—and am going on well.~~

~~wounded and hope to be discharged soon.~~ work my ticket.

~~I am being sent down to the base.~~

I have received your { letter dated \_\_\_\_\_  
telegram .. \_\_\_\_\_  
parcel- .. \_\_\_\_\_

Letter follows at first opportunity.

I have received no letter from you in my life.

~~lately~~

~~for a long time.~~

Signature only Bill the Sailor.

Date God only knows.

(Postage must be prepaid on any letter or post card addressed to the sender of this card.)

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An old woman wrote to me about her son's effects. I had helped to bury him and wrote a letter of condolence to his mother. Some scoundrel had robbed him, and the mother asked me to try to find his watch. She enclosed a slip which ran as follows :

E.F. No. 146.

If any articles of private property belonging to the deceased have been recovered, they will have been sent to the Officer in charge of Infantry Records, London, who has been authorized to forward to you any articles that may be forthcoming. If you do not receive any communication from that Officer it must be assumed that no articles have been recovered.

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The mother was anxious to recover a watch that her son had received for rescuing a person from drowning. It was inscribed, and I had no difficulty in tracing it to a miserable rotter in B platoon whose favourite hobby was robbing the dead.

Some of the men had acquired bowie-knives which were useful for cutting throats on dark nights. When Jerry first used them we thought it rather barbarous but soon followed suit. On patrol a shot attracted attention, and things at once became unhealthy, but a sharp knife across a man's throat made no noise, and ensured that death was almost instantaneous. A badly aimed shot might wound a man and leave him groaning for hours.

The new arrivals consisted mainly of men who had been wounded, and recruits from the depot. The old hands had lost all enthusiasm and their pessimism infected the novices. One of the new men named Rhodes interested me. He was quiet and spoke in a cultured voice. The N.C.O.s had been giving him hell, for he knew hardly any drill, and was terribly awkward at most tasks that fell to the lot of the private soldier. He was in my section, and I questioned him to ascertain if he had any aptitude for any branch of the military trade. He was about twenty-five, wore pince-nez, and had been a ladies' dress designer. Seeing that he was quite useless for the usual routine, I nominated him for a vacancy as officer's servant, and he secured the job, which suited him admirably; he made an excellent valet.

I had forgotten him when one evening he came to my shack with a bottle of whisky, obviously purloined from the officers' mess. However, I took what the gods bestowed, asked no questions, and at midnight we buried the empty bottle. Rhodes told me his troubles and I assured him that as soon as he settled down he would find things less appalling than first impressions promised. The men were a rough lot and made fun of his accent, his pince-nez, and his profession. He was most grateful to me for getting him his job, and promised me a tot of good stuff whenever circumstances permitted.

The battalion went into the line in front of Ypres, and

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I was given a temporary job as quartermaster-sergeant's assistant, the main duty of which was to take up ammunition, rations and stores every night. We left Poperinghe after nightfall and got back whenever the fortunes of war permitted. Usually it was at about four in the morning. The road was mostly *pavé* and lined with trees. At night it was always crowded with troops and transport. The German guns had the range to an inch, and when the shells came over, like broadsides from giant battleships, they hit the road with uncanny accuracy. Whatever the shortcomings of the German Army may have been, defective gunnery was not one of them. The shells tore great gaps in the road or burst overhead, ripping branches off trees and sending large jagged pieces of steel, that flew through the air with a loud whirring noise that struck fear into all except those who had imbibed enough to deaden their nerves. The infantry dashed for the sides of the road and dropped down into the ditches.

One night I lost a horse and two men before reaching Vlamertinghe, where a military policeman had stopped the traffic. There had been heavy strafing ahead and some artillery transport had been smashed up. The road was being filled in. After a long delay we proceeded with our steel helmets firmly strapped on, and gas-masks ready. Between Vlamertinghe and Ypres the scene was reminiscent of Zola's "*Débâcle*." Artillery drivers and horses had been hit. They were lying in their blood at the sides of the road. Waggon and limbers were in pieces, and quantities of shells were strewn near them. Our wheels sank in the newly filled shell holes but we managed to avoid being held up. The stink of explosives and blood was in the air, the horses became restless and pranced in terror. I had to appear calm in front of the men for they had a bad attack of wind-up and tried to hang back. As we drew near the ruined city the shells crashed among the houses, and we knew we were in for an extremely unpleasant time in the narrow streets. The ruins of the great Cloth Hall rose up on our left and masonry crashed down in clouds of dust that made us cough and sneeze.

The Grande Place was being heavily shelled and a



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Canadian officer held us up. Eventually we made a detour, and passed through narrow side streets, where the gaunt ruined houses looked top-heavy, and threatened to collapse at any minute. Many gaped with the entire façade torn away; all the front rooms were exposed as in a doll's house. Bedsteads were hanging from rafters, and pieces of furniture protruded from gaping walls. Shells whistled over our heads, coming down at a steep angle, and bursting in showers of bricks and debris. Pieces of walls and roofs were crashing round us, the fumes were asphyxiating, and the blackness overhead was lit up by bursting shrapnel; bricks flew round us in profusion, and without our steel helmets we would certainly have been killed. The horses were hit by shrapnel bullets and set off at a mad gallop. The drivers lost control, and we hurtled along the narrow street in inky darkness, with shells screaming, crashing, and bursting, above, and on both sides. How we escaped I shall never understand.

After about a mile the road turned at right angles, but the maddened horses were unable to stop, dashed straight on into the ruins of the house opposite, and came to a standstill among the heaps of bricks and boards; the animals were broken and bleeding; I shot them.

Telling the men to guard the food and stores, I set out to find the company. It was near the Menin Road but I got hopelessly lost. The shelling was still heavy, and tear-gas shells made my eyes water until I could see nothing. I stumbled over old trenches, fell into a canal, tore my clothes on wire, and sheltered for half an hour in a cellar used as a mortuary. The bodies were covered with blankets and waterproof sheets; their heavy, muddy boots stuck out rather pathetically. I counted the dead; there were fourteen. The place was in pitch-darkness except when I flashed my torch.

The shelling outside diminished somewhat, and I was about to crawl out through the aperture when a corpse moved and called out for water. He sat up, threw off his blanket, and looked at me with haggard eyes. His face was covered with blood from a head wound, and one arm was pulverized. There was a jagged hole in the chest.

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I gave the fellow a drink of rum from my bottle and felt his pulse which was fairly strong. He had been stunned or had fainted, and the men clearing the road threw him down among the corpses, thinking him dead.

I was able to find two men and a stretcher; they were R.A.M.C. bearers looking for wounded. The alleged corpse recovered and is alive to-day. I was the last to leave the cellar, and pushed out my torch so that I could climb more easily out of the aperture. When I crawled out of the hole the torch had disappeared. Some passing soldier, seeing a torch pushed out from a hole in the ground, had promptly picked it up and made off. I would have done the same myself.

Wandering about between the railway and Zillebeke Lake I stumbled on some artillery positions, and the first indication I had of their presence was when I heard a voice cry "Fire!" There was a blinding flash, an ear-splitting roar, a terrific rush of air, and I fell to the ground, more frightened than hurt. A couple of gunners rushed out, and one said: "'E's a bloody goner, the silly b—— walked right in front of the gun."

I was suffering slightly from shock and an officer cursed me like hell for walking in front of a battery in action. I felt like asking him how the devil he expected strangers to see guns in the dark, but prudence prevailed and I held my peace. They told me the sixty-pound shell had missed my head by a foot at most. My left ear was affected and has been deaf ever since. After cursing my folly and assuring me that I did not deserve to live, the officer indicated, by pointing his arm, where the battalion was, and I resumed my search.

There remained one further adventure before reaching my objective, and that was falling into a large shell-hole which contained about two feet of stinking, stagnant water, a dead horse in an advanced state of putrefaction, a torn gas helmet, a wooden cross and a broken rifle. The awful roar of a large shell like an express train falling on my head from the sky made me dive into the hole, where I lay for a few seconds spitting filth out of my mouth, and wiping mud out of my eyes.

It was three in the morning when I found the company, after being shot at by a sentry. The Captain, who had returned, fired off a series of questions, and appeared impressed by the dents in my helmet. I told him what had happened and he must have been informed by telephone of the severe strafing, for his only comment was that we had been lucky to get as far as we did. I took a party of men, and we returned with part of the food and stores before dawn; the remainder had to wait until the following night.

My job lasted ten days and then I had another spell in the line. The scene in front, and in fact all round, was such that only a painter like Hogarth could do justice to it. The platoon commander, Lieutenant Walker, invited me to go on patrol with him, probably to test my nerves, for he was a new-comer, and I knew nothing about him beyond that he came from another battalion, with a reputation for courage and qualities of leadership. We had two men with us, and set out to reconnoitre the terrain, with the object of ascertaining if Jerry was occupying a listening-post and whether his patrols were active. I believe our side contemplated a raid. We deployed and slithered through the mud. Rain started to fall, and the German artillery suddenly began a concerted bombardment of the roads behind us. It was as if countless red-hot swords were slashing holes in an immense black curtain. Our artillery retaliated with counter-battery work, and although inferior in numbers, succeeded in silencing some of the enemy guns, for the strafing gradually died down and ceased except for spasmodic bursts.

The ground we traversed was like a muddy foreshore from which the sea had just receded. As we drew near the post, Walker told me to get into it and find out if it had been occupied recently. I licked my lips, which were dry in spite of the rain, and felt all my old fears returning. Gripping my knife firmly I crawled like a snake and got round to the back of the hole. Looking over the edge, I saw the outline of a man peering towards the British lines. I could have withdrawn, but a sudden impulse seized me, and, springing on the fellow's back, I slashed

my knife across his throat before he realized what was the matter. The blood spurted out over my hands and in my fury I had almost severed the head. The wretch hardly made a sound and sank down lifeless.

I was going through his pockets when a sleepy voice at my side said "*Was ist los, Fritz?*" It was the sentry off duty, snatching a little sleep in a cavity hollowed out in the side of the post. I flashed my torch on the recumbent figure, and, before he had time to open his sleep-laden eyes, I drew my butcher's knife across his throat from ear to ear. He also died without a sound; his body twitched and trembled, then lay still. I took the contents of their pockets, but there was nothing of military importance. There was a card in the breast-pocket of the older man and I have it before me as I write. It contains some verses from Goethe that appeal to me very much. They run as follows:

*"Im innern ist ein Universum auch,  
Daher der Völker löblicher Gebrauch,  
Dass jeglicher des Beste, was er kennt,  
Er Gott, ja seinen Gott bekennt,  
Ihm Himmel und Erden übergiebt  
Ihm furchtet und, womöglich, liebt."*

Both my victims were young men; one looked like a student and had fine features; the other was of sturdy build and medium height, probably a skilled artisan, for he had cuttings from an electrical journal in his pockets. I crawled back to Walker and told him in whispers what had transpired. He was pleased with the exploit and recommended me for a mention.

In the trenches I hated stand-to at dawn more than anything else. The cold chilled one to the marrow, and lack of sleep rendered one more susceptible to it. The rum issue was the only consolation and sometimes that was missing. Our feet slipped from under us in the slime, and often they sank so deeply that it was difficult to pull them out. There was a foul smell all along the trench and it was worst at the dug-out entrances. Men evacuated up against the trench walls in the dark, and after soaking

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into the ground the urine gave off its characteristic odour and polluted the atmosphere. At stand-to the sleepers were kicked and shaken until they crawled out and stood ready for a possible attack, yawning, cursing, scratching, and longing for stand-down. The sky was black and turned slowly to grey; our faces were also grey, the landscape was grey; there was greyness in our hearts. Death hovered over the unsightly waste; the crack of snipers' rifles warned us to keep low, for many men had been picked off in the uncertain light of dawn, when they thought they were still invisible.

In the dug-outs we sat and killed lice, played cards, smoked and cursed the war, the weather, the grub, the lice, and the stinks. We knew far less about the war than people at home, and craved nothing but quiet in our sector, so that life was not made quite impossible. The ground in front rose slightly towards the German front line about two hundred yards away. Behind us was the remains of a wood; every tree had been stripped and mutilated by shells. The decapitated trunks were further lacerated daily by flying splinters which remained embedded in the wood. It was as if giants had been playing darts. A mutilated tree is a melancholy sight, but thousands of them standing in a sea of mud and débris fill the heart of a nature-lover with a despondency too deep for words. The sky was full of black clouds that burst almost daily, replenished the water in the shell holes, and made the quagmire daily more treacherous. We were usually soaked to the skin and the trenches were in truth sloughs of despond.

After a few days in billets we went in again, and occupied some craters that changed hands almost weekly. Within twenty-four hours of occupying them we were driven out, leaving a number of dead and wounded in the hands of the enemy.

Our guns away back in Ypres put up a concentrated barrage, and buried the Germans, who were consolidating the craters, in muddy graves; nothing could live in such a hail of steel. Just before dawn we rushed the holes and killed a few wounded survivors with bombs. They were brave men and resisted to the end. In our turn we tried

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to consolidate our gains but the ground was not solid enough ; it was like liquid glue and fell in as fast as we dug. We hung on to the lips of the craters entirely cut off from the rear. At night the flares showed us how precarious our position was ; we were almost surrounded. The salient was so deep that we were shot at from both sides as well as the front. Some of our men were actually killed by shots from the rear, for the enemy had pushed forward at one point that was practically behind us.

Our rifles were hopelessly clogged with mud ; the bomb was the only effective weapon under such conditions. Many of the wounded were drowned in the mud. A dead horse was lying on its back a few yards on my left. Its belly was blown up and a man crouched behind it. At night we were supplied with more bombs, and some food that we ate with mud-encrusted paws. We were unshaven, bleary-eyed, and looked more like ogres than men. Jerry gave us no respite and his guns pumped steel into us day and night. Showers of stick bombs came from his front line, and, although most of them fell short, our numbers were gradually thinned. Trench-mortar bombs added to our discomfort and I began to think none of us would survive. Sleep was impossible, and for three days and nights we had none.

We expected to be relieved on the fourth night, and the time of waiting seemed interminable. A piece of shrapnel caught Walker in the thigh and the blood gushed out ; I tried to apply a shell dressing but the wound was too big. My muddy hands made the bandage filthy ; it was impossible to get him back and he bled to death. He was a man, fearless, and entirely oblivious of self. Before he died I got him a little water from a dead man's bottle, but, realizing he was doomed, he passed it to a private who was also wounded and crying out for water.

A regular named Blackmore was lying near me. He had been preparing to go on leave before we went into the line, but leave had been suddenly stopped for some unknown reason. He was excited at the prospect of seeing his wife and children again, after an absence of over a year, and kept muttering : " If only Jerry misses me until we

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are relieved!" A bomb burst in the crater on our left, and the explosion was followed by the most piteous groans and cries for help. I crawled flat in the mud hoping to get a blighty one on the way. Most of us were so satiated with disgust at our foul surroundings, so overwrought by the constant danger, that we did anything to secure a wound that would take us out of it. At Loos, one of our signallers was in a blue funk, until he gulped down some rum, and, jumping on top of a ruined wall, sent a semaphore message for help, while the Germans were potting at him. He was wounded and got the M.M. He told me afterwards that he felt he had to get wounded or go mad.

There were, of course, countless acts of genuine bravery, but mine were not among them. I undertook risks merely to end the suspense. Anything was better than lying in the ubiquitous mud, expecting death day and night.

When I reached the spot whence came the groans I found the bomb had killed two men, and the only survivor was breathing his last. His head was a bloody mess and his ribs were exposed; the flesh had been flayed from his body. It was curious that a man could live for ten minutes in such a state. I crawled back to the hole where I had left Blackmore, but he was no longer there. A shell had obliterated him. He had been completely buried by the burst, and his mangled remains lay at the bottom of the water-logged crater.

A distant cry of "Gas!" made me put on my gas helmet before the yellowish-green fumes reached me. We lay in the rain with our heads in those shapeless bags that made us resemble prehistoric monsters. Luckily the gas hung about in No-Man's Land, and that meant immunity from attack for a few hours. I gathered some bombs and cursed my mask, for it was clouded, inside with sweat, and outside with rain and mud. We had been instructed to clean the goggles by rubbing them against the inside of the mask, and after much difficulty I was able to see again.

I was alone in the hole, and a German officer, thinking no doubt that it was unoccupied, crawled forward to investigate. He was also wearing a mask, and I reflected that he could see no better than I. His big revolver made

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me think quickly and I decided to throw a bomb as soon as he came near enough. I was afraid that if I threw too soon it would sink in the slush and do but little damage. However, when he was about ten yards distant, I threw three bombs in rapid succession, holding each one a couple of seconds after pulling the pin. One burst near his head, another at his side, and one missed. He gave a convulsive jump like a shot deer and lay still. His feet kicked once or twice, but I saw with satisfaction that his face was in the mud and his head was in pulp.

It was growing dark and once again the flares went up. Red bursts flashed in the blackness, and heavy shells dropped on the town, to catch the traffic that never ceased from dusk to dawn. All the noises of hell broke out with renewed fury. Sometimes the guns were fairly quiet during the day, as aircraft were busy hunting for their positions, and as soon as a battery position was discovered it became most unhealthy. Jerry was most thorough in his counter-battery work, and would search and sweep a site where he thought guns were concealed, until hardly a square yard of ground remained untouched. I was still lying waiting for the relieving party when suddenly my blood froze, for I heard a whisper in German just above my head. The speaker told his companion to go to the next hole as he wished to do some private business in mine. I lay still, hardly daring to breathe, and hoped that, if seen, I would appear dead.

A young German wearing a deep steel helmet and with a stick bomb in each hand jumped in, and nearly landed on top of me. He was unaware of my presence and proceeded to unbutton his trousers. I could not throw a bomb, he was too near. My knife had disappeared and I was in a quandary. As the German squatted down to do his business, I sprang on him from behind, and got a vice-like grip on his throat. He went down, taken completely by surprise, and struggled fiercely. I realized it was his life or mine, and pressed until I felt his windpipe flatten in his throat. My hands had the strength of despair and the poor devil had no chance. Even after a shudder passed through his body and it grew limp, I held on in case it



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might be a ruse. He had sunk in the viscid mess at the bottom of the hole and there I left him. His companion came to within a few yards and I let him have a couple of bombs; it was too dark to observe their effect, but the man came no nearer.

In the middle of the night the relief turned up, and I crawled back with a handful of survivors to some reserve trenches near the railway embankment. It was suspected that Jerry was preparing to attack and we were required to remain in the vicinity. I noticed with satisfaction that the dug-out was deep, for my nerves were in a bad state after the excitement had subsided. The shelter was about thirty feet deep, and timbered like a mine. There was a pump for keeping the water down, otherwise it would have been uninhabitable. There were about fifty men in the place and the smell was indescribable. The usual chemical-soaked blanket hung in the doorway and the ventilation was nil. The steam from our wet clothes, and the sweat from our filthy bodies, concocted the vilest fuf I've ever known. I fell asleep from utter exhaustion, and, in spite of the lice, did not wake until next morning. We did some fatigues during the day, but had a fairly easy time as a German balloon was watching us. After dark we carried bombs and wire until four in the morning, and were allowed to sleep the following day. With intervals for food I slept for twelve hours and was greatly refreshed as a result.

We carried again at dusk and finished at midnight. We were just inside the dug-out when Jerry started a particularly violent strafe, and the shelling increased in intensity until the bursts ceased to be intermittent. We listened to the roaring inferno; whump, crash, bang, smash. I crept to the doorway and withdrew quickly, as splinters and shrapnel bullets whizzed down into the trench. I realized it was the prelude to an attack, and did not wish to be caught like a rat in a trap.

Brown, who had gone outside in response to an urgent call from nature, returned in haste and fell headlong down the stairs, carrying me with him to the bottom. We fell in the middle of a group playing banker. Some of those fellows would play cards in hell if it were possible. Brown

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was badly hit; his anus was bloody and his neck had a gaping wound; he had also been hit less seriously in other parts. We applied iodine while he roared with pain. His face grew white and we saw he was doomed. The strafe continued for another two hours, and it was death to go outside. The men urinated and excreted in the sump; no one took any notice.

An hour before dawn Jerry attacked and got a hot reception; rifles had been cleaned and oiled. Our machine-guns poured a withering fire into his ranks, but still he came on, and established a footing in our front line. He sought to extend his gains, shooting and bombing with the frenzy of despair. When the lull came he remained in possession of our old front line, and appeared to have gained two or three hundred yards on a mile front.

He was not left long in enjoyment of his capture—if lying in such a pestilential place could be termed enjoyment—for the British high command appeared resolved to hang on in the Salient regardless of losses.

Some said that we had to stay in front of Ypres for sentimental reasons, as there were so many dead in that shell-swept stretch of ground that projected towards the enemy. Such a reason savoured of lunacy, for although straightening the line would have involved the sacrifice of countless graves, it would also have meant the saving of countless lives. In my humble opinion it is folly to sacrifice a single life for a thousand corpses. During the war each side wasted an enormous number of lives and shells in straightening salients. It seemed to the private soldier that every effort should have been made to encourage the enemy to push forward isolated salients into our front, for he was then at a considerable disadvantage; he was shot at from both sides as well as from the front and his transport suffered very severely. Of course we knew nothing about tactics or strategy, and if the pawns in the game started to reason they would not be prepared to sacrifice themselves so readily. A great deal of our spare time was spent in cursing the G.H.Q., which in our opinion was composed of lunatics. In five minutes we proved how the war could be won, peace signed, and all the troops sent home. It

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was simply that we were on a treadmill, and seeing no end to it, became disgruntled and snarled like dogs. Instead of recognizing that our sufferings were the inevitable concomitant of war, we sought a scapegoat, and it was usually the G.H.Q.

We were reinforced the next night by Canadians. They were, on the whole, bigger than the European city-dweller, and more impatient of pettifogging tyranny. Our men would suffer any atrocious bully like the Captain; but those fellows from lumber camps and prairie were of sturdier stuff, and, when an officer was a rat, they made things hot for him, and he either climbed down or cleared out. Such men could never be commanded by a martinet; they would never put up with the insults that the English Tommy had to swallow daily from jackanapes.

Many regulars laughed at the colonial troops, but the men from oversea were on the whole better material than the unemployed who took the shilling in peace time. Many of the regulars were splendid soldiers, well disciplined, and fearless, but the general level of intelligence either among officers or men was not particularly high. The Canadians were fresh and fought as if inspired. Jerry resisted with extraordinary courage but had to give way, leaving some wounded prisoners in our hands.

The following night we were relieved and marched back to billets without serious loss, three men only being wounded by shrapnel. So many men had been killed that I was next for leave and got away two days later. The journey was uneventful, and the only incident connected with it that stands out in my memory was my arrival in London. Prostitutes thronged the stations and were reaping a rich harvest. One of them grabbed me and seemed to think she had only to hang on long enough to ensure my capitulation. I shook her off and she flopped to the ground pretending I had assaulted her. A policeman came up and took notes in a ponderous and portentous manner. When the case was called next day the woman was absent and it was dismissed. Many officers and men did not go home at all; the attractions of wine and women in London after the hell they had been through were too strong.

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Mother had aged so much that I would not have recognized her in the street. My brothers were expecting to go overseas immediately and that worried her terribly; I feared for her reason. Jean was in London and we met the morning after my arrival. A hitch in the divorce proceedings had irritated her, for her husband was living openly with his mistress. The warmth of her welcome dispelled my fears and she introduced me to a number of her relatives as her prospective husband.

The last few hours at home were a nightmare. The war showed no signs of ending, but I lied to cheer them up and said it would be over in a few weeks. Father was doing some special duty, as a constable I think, and was on duty when I left. Jean came to the station and wept in spite of her promise not to do so. A number of drunken Cockneys were dancing with women on the platform, singing: "It's a long way to Tipperary," and other popular songs. As the train steamed out Jean smiled bravely through her tears, and I saw a tiny white handkerchief fluttering as the platform disappeared.

## CHAPTER XV

I FOUND the company in a village near Poperinghe ; the billets were ruined houses. A corporal and a cook had gone to hospital with disease. Both of them concealed it until concealment was no longer possible. The day after my arrival I was ordered to take four men and report to the Town Major in Ypres.

On arriving at the ruins we were instructed to proceed to a certain street, in order to prevent looting and damage to property. It was a cushy job with a vengeance. The fine weather was coming on, and we were actually free from lice, having discovered a big zinc bath that we filled from shell-holes. It was an unexpected luxury and we bathed several times a day. We spent our time eating, sleeping, and exploring the ruins. There was a canteen in a cellar on the other side of the square, and we procured all kinds of delicacies there. We slept in a cellar, made as secure as possible with sacks of earth, beams, and layers of stones. Our roof would certainly not have stopped a five-point-nine, but it was paradise compared with the craters. Cooking was done at night when the smoke was invisible to the enemy. One night we had soup, bully with onions and potato, toasted cheese, tinned fruit and jam, followed by rum and milk. In the middle of the feast Jerry started a hellish strafe and a big shell landed a few feet from our roof. For a moment we thought our end had come ; one wall collapsed and we were smothered in dust ; rubble and dirt showered down while we crouched in the corners. Salvos of five-nines hurtled down in the ruins, flattening walls, and causing our shelter to shake as if it were in the throes of a violent earthquake. Riderless horses galloped past and crumpled up in the shell holes.

The remains of our supper were buried in the dirt, and

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we spent a couple of hours cleaning up the mess, afraid to go to bed in case the shelling recommenced. The entrance to our shelter was blocked up by the floors and walls that had collapsed during the cannonade. We worked feverishly to extricate ourselves when we felt the air growing foul, and realized we were in danger of suffocation. Our tools consisted of an iron bar, a broken spade, a pick-head, and three entrenching tools ; two were buried. After desperate exertions we cleared a small hole, and slept until dawn, when the exit was enlarged sufficiently to let us crawl out. Outside the scene baffled description. Dead horses and men were lying in the gutter ; broken waggons and limbers were strewn in pieces about the road ; yawning holes in the *pavé* showed how accurate the firing had been. The peculiar smell of explosives and mangled bodies hung in the air. Labour gangs came and filled in the holes, the dead were carried away, and at noon the street was clear.

The city of phantoms looked as if some gigantic tremor had shaken the shattered ruins, leaving them more forlorn than before. As I stood among the broken houses I wondered if it were possible that less than two years before young men and maidens made love there, walking hand in hand across the Plaine d'Amour, dancing in the cafés, arranging their *fiançailles*. Was it possible that old folk had sat at those very doors of a summer's evening, enjoying the balmy air after a hot day, while little children played round their feet ? At night, when the stark ruins were silhouetted against the horizon, I tried to picture the town as it was in July, 1914. Visitors drove up to the Hôtel de Gand, busy cloth merchants transacted their business, boats heavily laden came up the river to the warehouses ; the Grande Place on market day crowded with peasants from the surrounding districts ; sightseers wandered through the Cloth Hall, the Nieuwerk and the cathedral—a magnificent and imposing mass of architecture—children running joyously home from school ; all the countless activities and joys of a busy country town. Then the rain of incendiary bombs, shells from big guns, flight, death, desolation, ghastly ruins.

I stood in the middle of what had once been an ornate

drawing-room. Valuable pictures were hanging in tatters, half of a bedstead protruded through the ceiling; a wardrobe, burst open, had fallen from an upper room. In the drawer of a secretaire were invitations to dances, dinners, weddings and funerals; also a bundle of love-letters, tied with faded pink ribbon, still redolent of lavender and rose leaves. Opening the shattered door of the wardrobe, I saw a collection of what were once fashionable and valuable silk dresses. Among the papers in the bureau was the portrait of a young lady, beautiful, dark, with a sweet and gentle expression. Without doubt she was the owner of the *billets-doux*. I wondered if she were dead or a refugee, while a stranger roamed through her ancestral home, handling, not without sympathy, her most cherished possessions. Shell splinters were embedded in the grand piano, of which the keyboard was entirely shattered. A trunk, obviously packed in haste, was half buried under a heap of bricks and plaster. It contained articles of value, heirlooms and clothing. They had probably been packing when the shells fell too near and they had to flee. It was possible that they were buried in the ruins; there were three crosses in the garden, but they bore no names, and might have been put there by soldiers to mark the resting-place of their comrades.

One of the men in my charge had found some female attire and rigged himself up with shoes; the heels were about three inches high. Blue silk stockings, a pair of voluminous knickers adorned with a couple of inches of old lace, a pink blouse crowned with red poppies, completed a grotesque picture. He cavorted round the cellar, pulled a powder-puff from a gaudy hand-bag and dabbed his cheeks; there was a pencil for the eyebrows and rouge for the lips. With mincing steps he walked round his companions, asking how much they would pay for the pleasure of his company. It was a low fee for a short time but a night was expensive. He had padded his breasts and buttocks.

Another fellow had fished a harmonium out of the ruins of an adjacent building, and produced plenty of sound if little music. He played the most dismal hymns, and we

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sang with gusto to the tune of "The Church's one foundation":

"We are Fred Karno's army,  
What bloody good are we?  
We cannot fight, we cannot drill,  
We only go on the spree;  
And when we get to Berlin,  
The Kaiser he will say,  
*Ach! Ach! Mein Gott!*  
What a bloody rotten lot  
Are the boys I've seen to-day."

Then Smith, a Cockney who claimed to have been on the stage, preached a most oratorical sermon, in which the miserable sinners in front of him were enjoined to put plenty of money in the plate, because it was Easter and the Rev. Kiddum desired to go to Eastbourne for his holiday. We were warned that failure to give lavishly would put us in danger of hell fire, down in the regions where there would be weeping and wailing and gnashing of teeth. "But I've no teeth to gnash," cried Staines, who cracked his false set on a hard biscuit and hadn't a tooth in his head. "My sinful brother," replied the Rev. Smith in grave tones, "teeth will be provided."

Staines went out at dusk and returned with a jar of rum. He had won it, in soldiers' language, and I asked no questions. We bought a few tins of condensed milk in the canteen, mixed equal quantities of rum and milk; the result was nectar. We had a glorious carousal for three days.

One day an old woman, neatly dressed in black, came with a permit to search in the ruins of her home. A gendarme accompanied her, but the spot was unhealthy and he disappeared, saying he would wait at the corner; there was a deep dug-out to which he repaired. I helped her, and she told me that her daughter, son-in-law, and their child, were buried in the garden, having been killed by a shell; that explained the crosses in the garden. As I watched her trembling hands groping among the disordered piles of clothes, broken furniture, shattered pictures, and stained photographs, I visualized millions of mothers all



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over Europe, raking among the embers of the past, weeping for sons and husbands who would never return :

*" Vos veuves aux fronts blancs, lasses de vous attendre,  
Parlent encore de vous en remuant la cendre  
De leur foyer et de leur cœur."*

While men, out in front of Ypres, and all along the front, were butchering each other in the mud, blinding and maiming, leaving the wounded to drown in the flooded shell holes, their women folk were sitting staring into space. They watched a tiny child in its cradle, or the bigger ones at their lessons ; dreading every knock at the door, until the day when the grim official notification arrived, and the widows and orphans commenced the longer and more bitter stage of their martyrdom, which started when Europe went mad and the bread-winner was called away from his humble employment to be thrown into the furnace.

I began to wander away from the area we had to guard, and spent some time in the ruins of the cathedral, where I found two manuscripts. They were of parchment, and as far as I could judge in old Flemish. I put them in my pack, hoping to make some attempt at deciphering them after the war, if I should live to see the end of it. One realized the vanity of earthly things after wandering for days in the ruins, rummaging among the remains of homes that had resounded with childish laughter :

*" Où, sous la porte bien close,  
La jeune nichée éclore  
Des saintetés de l'amour  
Passe du lait de la mère  
Au pain qu'un père  
Pétrit des sueurs du jour.*

*" Où ces beaux fronts de famille,  
Penchés sur l'âtre et l'aiguille,  
Prolongent leurs soirs pieux :  
O soirs ! ô douces veillées  
Dont les images mouillées  
Flottent dans l'eau de nos yeux."*

The bridal chamber was now most foul and pestilential,

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desecrated by brutal soldiers. The bed, hung with lace curtains, and the tiny cot beside it, were profaned by stinking rubbish and worse. I thought that if there were a God in heaven, surely those responsible for the dreadful cataclysm, with its abominable crimes of lust and foul murder, would receive some terrible punishment. But the thought that all those homes could be wiped out in almost a moment, that millions of talented young men, potential geniuses in every realm of art and science, could be blown to pieces by hobbledehoyos with just enough brains to become dangerous homicidal maniacs—all that strengthened my idea that if there is a God, He cares no more about men than He does about mice or worms, perhaps less. Ever since the animal called man reached the stage where abstract thought becomes possible, he has never ceased examining the questions of his origin and destiny; he has discovered nothing and has made himself thoroughly wretched. Realizing he must die, he broods over the idea of extinction, and usually refuses to accept it, partly through egoism, partly through cowardice. The instinct of self-preservation is strong in us all. We, like drowning men clutching at straws, imagine a future and eternal world where Uncle Joe and Cousin Bill will smoke golden pipes and spit into celestial spittoons.

Some rats scuttled away as I went down into a cellar; the body of a soldier was lying there, partly eaten. I thought of going through his pockets, but the smell was too offensive and I withdrew.

Next day a message came for me to go to Poperinghe in order to give evidence at a Field General Court-Martial. I had been expecting the summons for some time, and was rather glad when it came, as the suspense was getting somewhat on my nerves. One night a private lost his nerve as we were going up to the trenches with ammunition rations and stores. The shelling was too much for him, and he disappeared in the darkness. I found him back in billets next day, and cursed him for being a bloody fodl, but could see that his nerve had gone. A few nights later he ran away in the darkness near the Menin Gate.

The shelling was atrocious, and I felt more than once like

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following his example. I had been watching him trembling and shuddering every time a shell dropped near, and was not surprised when he vanished. I had made up my mind not to report his temporary defection, but he was still absent next day and was posted as a deserter. Nothing was heard of him for fourteen days; he was then arrested at Le Havre wearing civilian clothes. The military policeman who caught him said he was hanging about the docks, trying to sneak on a ship bound for England.

The scene in the court was impressive, and I had a foreboding that he was doomed. In a civilian court it would have been easy to secure an acquittal. A psychiatrist could have proved that the prisoner's mind had given way as the result of unbearable stress; that he could no more have controlled his flight than a rabbit when the hounds are after it. He had enlisted in the first days of the war at the age of eighteen and had been in many fierce engagements. However, according to military law the crime was clear, and so was the penalty. There was only one possible sentence. In time of peace we usually agree that, broadly speaking, punishments are made to fit crimes, there is a kind of popular conscience which approves the sentence.

In time of war values are upset. The culprit has often not deliberately done any wrong, has even made a great sacrifice, and suffered to the limit of his endurance. In spite of all those considerations severe punishment is necessary, for surely in times of stress many of us would slink away if we knew we would not be punished with exemplary severity. As I stood watching the prisoner, pale and haggard, I was struck more forcibly than ever before by the futility of war which has never settled any dispute in a satisfactory manner.

The prisoner was sentenced to death and the sentence was carried out at dawn a few days later. We formed up in a large square, and the prisoner had to be dragged to a post in the middle of the ground. He was gagged and bound before being blindfolded. The firing-party looked stern and grim; men whispered that although he had been a damn fool, they were sorry for the poor b——.

After the wretch had been tied to the post his hands

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kept twitching and his limbs trembled. The finding of the court was being read out when a German aeroplane appeared overhead and dived on us, blazing away with his machine-guns. We scattered in all directions, leaving a number of dead and wounded on the ground. Four bombs were dropped and they made deep holes with ragged edges. The Archies were afraid to fire on account of the German being so near the ground, but they wasted hundreds of shells on him when he turned for home.

When the danger was over we formed up again and the firing-party faced the prisoner, who had been wounded, for blood ran from his side and face. I doubt if he was still alive. An officer dropped a handkerchief and the volley rang out.

"Thank Christ the dirty mucking business is over," muttered a sombre-looking man at my side, spitting on the ground. As soon as the sound of the shots died away the officer who appeared to be master of ceremonies stalked up to the mangled body hanging on the post, placed his revolver in the mouth, from which he had pulled the gag, and scattered the dead man's brains. He may have thought the prisoner was still alive, or it may have been the usual procedure.

I spoke to a man who had been guarding the prisoner, and he said he would not like to undergo a similar experience for a long time. The condemned man had sat on a bench with his head in his hands, moaning and swaying from side to side. Sometimes he shrieked for his mother and father, in a way that was positively blood-curdling. Then he lay on the floor with his face pressed against the rough earth, kicking convulsively and shaking just as I had seen him do up in Ypres. He tore his handkerchief to shreds and bit his hands until they ran with blood. When he grew a little calmer and tried to smoke a cigarette, his fingers refused to hold it. He broke out into roars of demoniac fury and the guards were obliged to put their fingers in their ears. "Mother, oh Mother!" he moaned, "it wasn't my fault. I tried to stay there but my shattered nerves wouldn't let me. Oh, my God! In three hours I shall be riddled with bullets, cold and under the sod."

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He beat his head against the wall ; his moans, cries of anguish, and roars of terror, continued until he was pinioned and dragged to the post. I believe he fainted when tied and gagged, the spasmodic twitchings were merely due to reflex action. I shall never forget the way he looked at me when I was giving evidence. I had tried hard to get him acquitted, stressing extenuating circumstances, but was curtly told to confine myself to facts.

I took back two bottles of rum to the cellar and we had a carousal to forget the horrors of the execution. We had tins of sardines, fruit and milk, bought at the B.E.F. canteen. The punch we concocted would have floored a horse. Smith was in good form and told stories until we were too drunk to listen, and he had ceased to be articulate.

Here is the least offensive of his yarns. A young man, sole support of his aged parents, responded to the call of duty and enlisted. Naturally the old folk expected that he would send them part of his pay, but no money came. After many weeks they received a letter from the son informing them that he had a feather in his cap, and had been promoted lance-corporal. Still no money came, but a little later another letter brought the news that the son had another feather in his cap, and was full corporal. Letter followed letter at irregular intervals, all containing the joyful news that other feathers had been added to those already in the cap, and further promotion secured. The last straw was a letter from the son saying that he could get leave, but needed money as he was broke. The old man found a pen and a scrap of paper. With great deliberation his horny fingers penned the following message :

*Dear son,*

*We rejoice that you have so many feathers in your cap, but regret very much that we are unable to send you any money. Don't despair however, just take all the feathers out of your cap, stick them up your backside and fly home.*

At the beginning of June we left Poperinghe for an unknown destination. Rumours were reaching us of a big offensive that was to end the war. It was to take place in

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the south and guns were already being massed there. When I recall all we heard about the Somme offensive, long before it started, I am sure Jerry knew as much as we did, and was preparing accordingly. We discovered that our destination was a village about twenty miles from Albert. We did the journey by road, taking four days. The weather was improving, and it was a delight to march through peaceful towns and villages, where the sounds of war were too distant to frighten the inhabitants, who worked in their fields, traded in their shops, or sat before their dwellings watching us go by.

One evening we camped in a meadow dotted with poppies and corn-flowers. After the dust and heat of the roads it was elysium. We swam in a brook, diving and splashing in the cool clear water. There were tents, but I slept under the stars, and before going to sleep pulled a copy of R. L. Stevenson's "Travels with a Donkey in the Cevennes" from my pack and read the following passage several times: "Night is a dead monotonous period under a roof, but in the open world it passes lightly, with its stars and dews and perfumes, and the hours are marked by changes in the face of nature. What seems a kind of temporal death to people choked between walls and curtains, is only a light and living slumber to the man who sleeps afield. All night long he can hear Nature breathing deeply and freely; and there is one stirring hour unknown to those who dwell in houses, when a wakeful influence goes abroad over the sleeping hemisphere, and all the out-door world are on their feet. It is then that the cock first crows, not this time to announce the dawn, but like a cheerful watchman speeding the course of night. Cattle awake on the meadows; sheep break their fast on dewy hill-sides, and change to a new lair among the ferns; and houseless men, who have lain down with the fowls, open their dim eyes and behold the beauty of the night."

No sign of war was visible in the village that was to be our home for some weeks. It was a pretty collection of cottages, gardens, farms and fields, peaceful lanes, and orchards where the tiny fruits were peeping out among the green leaves. The transition was so sudden from the mud

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holes in front of Ypres and the sombre ruins of the city, that it seemed unreal. The flowers were brighter than any I had ever seen before ; the girls prettier, the old folk more hospitable, the children merrier ; the simple peasant girls seemed goddesses to men whose eyes had gone bleary watching Véry lights, bursting shells and devastated landscapes.

The village in which we found ourselves was in a hollow between two hills ; one road led to Albert, the other to Abbeville. I had to arrange billets for the company, and found the people with whom I had to deal, much more complaisant than the peasants farther north. One Belgian farmer had locked up the handle of his pump, and it had been necessary to shatter the lock to get water. When I remonstrated with him, he bluntly declared that if the English had stayed in their own country his land would not have been destroyed. His house had been hit by more than one shell, his crops had been trampled down, and his fields used as gun-parks and horse-stands, so one could hardly blame him for his bitterness. In the village of Saint-Ange, where we now lived and drilled, bitterness was to some extent forgotten, and the men played with the children, while the old men and women sat sunning themselves before their doors.

I had a small room in a farmyard. It had been a horse-box, but with clean dry straw on the floor was fit for a king. In the evening when the day's duties were over we assembled in the two or three inns, drank beer, played cards, laughed and sang as if we hadn't a care in the world. The bugle, so long silent at the front, sounded again at intervals from dawn to "Lights-Out," and its tones were beautifully clear and dignified among those rustic scenes. At night I threw myself on the heap of straw, after removing my jacket and boots, and slept like a top until the energetic notes of Réveill   re-echoed among the farm buildings, for the bugler stood in the middle of the yard when he sounded the calls.

One day we were informed that there was to be a big battle, and the British troops were to attack on a wide front. The news was received in silence, there was no

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enthusiasm. We had seen too many frontal attacks against uncut wire and machine-guns; we knew what the cost would be. No man would shirk his duty, but there was no truth in the reports sent home by newspaper men and generals at head-quarters many miles behind the lines, that the troops cheered wildly when told they were going to attack.

We soon forgot the war again for a few days, however; it seemed so far away, or rather we took as our motto: "Eat, drink and be merry, for to-morrow we die." We charged across fields, and attacked positions from morning till night. It was glorious out in the open. When one is young and pulsating with life, and the corn waves yellow on the hill-side, and birds sing merrily overhead, it is impossible to feel depressed for long. It was only when we felt that the evil day was drawing near; then we grew morose and laughed rarely, usually when drunk. I found myself lying awake at night, calculating the chances of coming through safely, getting wounded or killed. It was almost impossible not to get wounded, all one could hope was that it would be slight.

Once again I rebelled at the thought of extinction, and like a condemned prisoner in his cell I examined all possible loopholes of escape, and wondered if one could get away with a self-inflicted wound. It had been done often enough, but something in me made me realize it was impossible. There was nothing for it but to go into the bloody mess again, and hope for the best.

I had seen death in its most repulsive forms, not as it comes to old people who sleep peacefully away, but as it tears young men to pieces. I often thought of the trenches as abattoirs, except that no society for the prevention of cruelty to animals would permit sheep or cattle to be maimed and tortured in the way men are. One's spirit cried out in protest against the prospect of being torn into hunks of bleeding flesh, or lying in a hospital crippled for life. My companions and I felt in Saint-Ange that life was sweet, and things that seemed banal before the war were appreciated as gifts of the gods. We were like shipwrecked mariners, long buffeted by angry seas, having suffered



hunger and thirst, blistered hands and utter weariness ; when most of our companions were dead or mutilated, we had reached a pleasant and fertile land where it was good to be. Who would not rather stay there than return to the wilderness of barbed wire, shell holes, devastation, and bitter death ? We felt that Europe's rulers had made a mess of things and we were the sacrificed generation wiping out with our blood the crimes we never committed.

Things were cheap in the village, too, for we were the first soldiers to be stationed in it, and profiteering had not yet raised its ugly head. It would come gradually, as it did in the north. In Ploegsteert, prices were reasonable until the Canadians came ; their pay was much higher than ours, and they often did not trouble to pick up their change. Our men got ten francs a fortnight, they got as much in less than two days. The English private was rather bitter about such differences in pay.

One Sunday I was able to absent myself for the day, and walked fifteen miles to a hamlet perched on top of a little hill. The church steeple was all one could see from the main road. As I crossed a field a lad tending cattle wished me good day in a strange accent. He was a Breton and spoke French badly. When I reached the cottages the children ran out to look at me, probably they had never seen an English soldier before. The inn had a little table outside under a tree, and never had beer tasted so cool and fresh as that which the buxom lass in heavy clogs brought me with a pleasant smile. It was a little after noon, and for lunch I had a lovely trout, an omelet containing four eggs and seasoned with herbs, fresh bread and cheese, and so many "bocks" that I lost count. The landlord was at the war, but his wife told me he was in no danger, for he was only a *garde-malade* in a military hospital. She was worried about her son, a lad of nineteen in the *chasseurs alpins* ; he had not written for many days and she could not account for the silence.

I assured her that no news was good news, but felt that, no matter how true such a proverb might be in time of peace, it was often a lying jade in time of war. She showed me the family portraits ; the husband looked rather awkward

and corpulent in his rough uniform, but the son was a smart young fellow with a pack on his square shoulders, and a dark beret that suited his handsome face. When I asked for the bill she did not wish to charge me anything, but I insisted, pointing out that I could not return for another meal unless I paid, so she allowed me to pay five francs, which was ridiculously inadequate for such a sumptuous repast, truly delicious after army rations.

Wandering through the village, I saw a minute cottage in a lovely garden. I was attracted because it looked so beautiful, and two small children were playing round the door. I asked for a cup of coffee and was invited inside. The mother of the children was a young peasant woman, extremely curious. Her husband was in a road-gang, having lost two or three fingers while working on a threshing machine, and deemed unfit therefore for active service. She complained of the cost of living, and wanted to know if things were cheaper in England. She told me her age was twenty-one and her eldest child was four. I agreed to take a *goutte* and she brought out a bottle of old kirsch. We had several *gouttes*, and, when she asked me if I would like to go with her into the bedroom for a little moment, my scruples vanished, and fierce desire rose within me. At that moment the elder child came to me with some flowers and looking up into my face said: "*Papa, je te donne ces fleurs*"; I had no faith, but a vague superstition remained, and I remembered the words of Christ that if a man offended a little child it were better for him to hang a millstone round his neck and drown himself in the depth of the sea. Giving the sensual woman ten francs I picked up my cap and went out saying: "*Madame, je regrette, mais je ne peux pas le faire.*"

"*Pourquoi pas?*" she asked, pressing herself against me and exacerbating my desire.

"*Parce que vous avez des enfants,*" and I strode rapidly down the hill, afraid my resolution would weaken unless I hurried.

An old woman was gathering sticks in her garden, and, when I greeted her, she asked me if I were a Russian, for she had heard that there were Russians in the neighbourhood. When I told her I was English she looked at me

closely and replied: "*Alors vous êtes méchant!*" When I asked her the reason for such a peremptory judgment, she tossed her grey locks and said: "*Vous avez brûlé Jeanne d'Arc, et exilé notre grand empereur sur une île où il est mort.*"

When I protested that I had had no hand in those matters she snapped: "*C'est votre pays qui l'a fait, donc c'est la même chose.*"

She was a typical French peasant woman, active, stubborn, kind-hearted under a scolding exterior, and rather garrulous. I had been reading Gustave Flaubert's "*Madame Bovary*," and was struck by the resemblance between Flaubert's old servant, who received a cheap medal for fifty-four years of service at the same farm, and the bent figure in front of me. As she came to the gate her enormous clogs clattered on the stones; she wiped her hands on her old blue apron and tidied the ribbons of her old-fashioned bonnet. When she spoke I saw her toothless gums; her chin and nose nearly met. Her eyes were keen and bright, but there were so many wrinkles that she must have been at least eighty.

After a little conversation she relented and invited me to have a cup of coffee. While she was in the back room I examined the coffee-pot, and found an old sock serving as strainer. Before enlistment that would have been enough to make me refuse coffee for some time. Army life had brought about such a change that I could eat the vilest food among the foulest smells; besides, the old woman's coffee was excellent.

On the wall was a picture of the great Napoleon, and she was much annoyed when I recited some verses from Béranger, and others from Hugo, attacking the great adventurer, whom I accused of using France as a docile mount to ride rough-shod over the rest of Europe. I asked her if it were not true that he had drained France of men and money, but she simply repeated that I was English, therefore jealous. On another wall were four pictures illustrating "*Le bon gîte*," by Deroulède, and the ancient dame smiled and was pleased when I recited the poem. Her husband had been killed near Sedan in the war of 1870-71, and for many years she had been in service, saving enough to live in her tiny cottage with a few fowls, a cow, and a

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couple of goats, in a plot of ground behind her humble abode. She repeated every two or three minutes: "*Mais il faut détruire les sales Boches*" with as much conviction as Cato the elder, when he said at the end of every speech that Carthage had to be blotted out.

The hearth of her cottage was of the old-fashioned kind, with a pot hanging from a chain, and a log fire underneath, which threw out a delightful smell of burning wood such as one associates with camp fires. We talked for an hour over our coffee to which my hostess added a drop of cognac; I appreciated the honour. As I left she kissed me on the cheek and cried: "*Que le bon Dieu vous protège et bénisse, mon enfant.*"

Wandering on, I saw a wisp of blue smoke rising above some trees, and came upon a thatched cottage with white walls. The path leading to it was lined with ferns, and little hedges seemed to wander aimlessly about the orchard and garden:

"These hedge-rows, hardly hedge-rows, little lines  
Of sportive wood run wild."

At the sound of my steps, a tall sturdy woman came to the door, and politely returned my salutation. She was about thirty, and pretty, with red cheeks and laughing eyes. I told her I was passing through the village and seeing her fruit trees wondered if she had any apples for sale. She replied that it was too early for apples but she had nice strawberries. I helped her to gather them, and ate them with cream, in an old room with large oak rafters across the ceiling. We discussed the war, and she told me that her husband was a prisoner, and that she hoped he would never return, for he was a drunkard and ill-treated her. The usual pictures were brought out, and while she stood at my side explaining what they were, I put my arm round her waist and drew her nearer to me. She uttered a startled: "*Mais, monsieur, il ne faut pas penser que je suis une femme légère,*" and allowed me to kiss her. In a little while she was sitting on my knees, kissing with all the abandon of a woman who had been deprived of amorous pleasures for a long time.

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It was getting late when I left, and I reached my horse-box at some time after midnight.

An orderly came and informed me that I was to accompany the captain to Albert. I wondered why I was chosen and suspected that it was because his French was atrocious, and he wished me to act as interpreter in case of need. He bore me no goodwill, for he probably realized that I despised him as a half-educated runt, afflicted with a cruel and vindictive disposition. The day after our arrival in Saint-Ange he severely punished a man for failing to salute. The victim felt that the punishment was excessive and appealed to the colonel. The request was granted (being in accordance with military law), but the captain took good care to see the colonel first; and the mess-waiter, who reported fragments of the conversation, heard the charged man described as a pernicious influence, undermining all discipline, and as a man of whom an example had to be made. The result was that the sentence, already grossly excessive, was increased. I knew the man to be a good soldier, but the captain had a down on him, and went out of his way to find him at fault.

So we rode out, and he uttered no word until we reached the outskirts of Albert. Immense preparations for the coming attack were everywhere visible. Thousands of field guns with wagons and limbers encumbered the dusty lanes. Regiments of cavalry were sheltered by trees and camouflage screens; all the infantry who saw them hugged the fond delusion that, as soon as the great attack started, they would chase the enemy to hell and beyond. The columns of marching men seemed endless. All looked fit and brown, fit for anything.

But no body, however fit, no mind however clear and courageous, can withstand hails of shells and machine-gun bullets. I had seen enough of frontal attacks to realize that few of those marching men would survive the onslaught, and of those who came through, precious few would live to see the end of the offensive, should it be prolonged as rumours promised. Albert was almost entirely in ruins, with a Madonna hanging by her feet from the tower of the church.

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The captain left me with the horses, saying he would return in an hour. At the end of three he had not turned up, so I tied the horses to a rafter, and explored the ruins in the vicinity. One house was almost intact, but I searched in vain for signs of human occupants. Birds had built their nests in the bedrooms; the furniture was stained with their droppings.

I was hungry and thirsty, having had no breakfast owing to a hurried departure, and hunted for a canteen; I failed to find one, but scrounged some cold tea and a hunk of bread from a cook who had his field-kitchen in the ruins. When I returned to the place where I had left the horses, after an absence of about fifteen minutes, the horses had gone. Having tied them securely I knew they had not wandered off of their own accord; it was probable that the captain had taken them. In a way I was glad, for I had no drawers or riding breeches, and my restive mount had skinned my legs and rump.

I walked most of the way back, although a lift on a lorry helped me over the worst part, and on my return was informed that I was under arrest. Next day I was notified that I could have a trial by court martial or revert to the ranks. I knew little or nothing of military law and had no means of obtaining advice. It seemed to me that to court martial an N.C.O. for leaving two horses unattended, while searching the immediate surroundings for food, was rather in the style of the junkerdom we were fighting, but I was in no way enamoured of my stripes and much preferred the freedom of the private soldier.

We moved up near Albert on June 28 and went into the front line after dark. It was impossible to avoid falling over obstacles, and I was nearly strangled by a telephone wire. Our guns were active, but Jerry let off frequent bursts of machine-gun fire to prove that he was on the alert, and I felt like a condemned criminal a few minutes before he is pinioned. The last two days before the attack were days of extreme tension. The guns on both sides were active, although ours were much more numerous than Jerry's, and plastered his trenches with shells of all sizes. It seemed impossible that anything could live under such

a bombardment, yet the bullets that skimmed our parapet warned us that a brave foe would oppose our advance to the utmost.

I sat down in the dug-out wondering what was in store, and listened to a fellow reading his Bible. He said he knew he was going to be killed, he felt it in his bones. He was a religious man and told me he didn't know how I could go over the top without first making my peace with God. His voice sounded truly awful as he read in a sepulchral tone: "I am the resurrection and the life, saith the Lord; he that believeth in me, though he were dead, yet shall he live: and whosoever liveth and believeth in me shall never die." I asked him why he didn't pray to God to spare his life, since we were told that all things were possible through prayer. He said we must never pray with selfish motives, and, that if God wanted him, he ought surely not to complain. Another man came in and told the religious one to shut up and put a sock in it.

"Leave him alone," I interposed; "if he wants to read his Bible it's nobody's business but his."

"Why doesn't he read the damn thing where we don't hear him?" replied the objector. "It's bad enough going over the bloody top without having the burial service read over you before you start."

I had not been aware that the holy man had been reading the burial service until my ears caught what followed: "I know that my Redeemer liveth and that he shall stand at the latter day upon the earth: and though after my skin worms destroy this body, yet in my flesh shall I see God. Whom I shall see for myself, and mine eyes shall behold, and not another." The horror of it got on my nerves and I went outside. In the latrine I met a man with literary tendencies, the only soldier I knew who wrote passable poetry. As we sat on the pole together he recited:

"A little breath, love, wine, ambition, fame,  
Fighting, devotion, dust—perhaps a name."

I told him about the Bible-reading and he said: "That b——s mad; he's got religious mania. He prays all day in odd corners, and like the Maid of Orleans hears voices

from heaven. I think he went balmy like Ivan Karamazov, and grabbed Christ when his mind gave way during a hellish strafe one night."

In spite of fits of depression I was not yet ready to welcome Death, and hoped fervently that once again my luck would hold. We had rehearsed the coming attack so often, that we knew it in theory off by heart. The only thing necessary for its complete success was that Jerry should take away his guns, bombs and wire, then hold up his hands. The weather was warm and sunny; the warm rays of the sun were a welcome change after the cold wet weather up at Ypres. The night before the attack a heavy *minenwerfer* bomb blew in part of the trench, and blocked our dug-out entrance so effectively that we thought we were buried alive. It was hours before they could dig us out, and one man had a severe attack of shell-shock. He crouched in a corner crying and moaning; whenever a shell burst near he screamed with terror and wrapped his head in his coat so that he would not hear the roar. The rest of us smoked and cursed until we found a fairly complete pack of cards; then we played banker. The British airmen were very active, chasing away enemy flyers, and shooting down observation balloons. It has always puzzled me when people talk about the chivalry of fighting in the air. Air tactics consisted mainly in shooting down slow machines, taking photographs, or in several machines cutting off one or two hostile planes, sitting on their tails, and shooting them down in flames.

A man known as Ginger was standing near me, and to cheer him up I said: "Never mind, Ginger, as soon as the whistle blows we'll run like hell and jump into their empty trenches."

"What a bloody 'ope you've got!" he replied bitterly; "a lot of runnin' we'll do with steel 'elmets, ammunition, bombs, water-bottles, rations, wire-cutters, entrenching-tools and rifles! As soon as I get a blighty I chuck down the muckin' lot an' they won't see my back for dust."



## CHAPTER XVI

AT dawn on July 1, 1916, the barrage grew to an intensity that cannot be described. The roar of the guns and the bursting of countless shells dazed me, and I pressed against the trench wall until I couldn't breathe. The air was filled with smoke, and red flashes denoted bursting shrapnel. The drum-fire increased in intensity, and clouds of black and white smoke drifted across the battle zone. The earth shook, splinters flew past our heads with vicious noises, and sank deeply in the earth, or tore out some unfortunate's bowels. The din was ear-splitting, uninterrupted and terrifying in the extreme; the air trembled with the mighty bursts of shells and bombs of all sizes.

Occasionally one of our own shells fell short, and we ducked as it screamed into the parados or parapet, bursting with a hellish roar. At 7.30 a.m. our barrage lifted, the whistles sounded and once more we clambered over the top. Once more Jerry swiftly got his machine-guns into position and mowed us down in heaps. The captain was one of the first to fall, blown to pieces by a shell. I felt sorry for him, for it is shocking to see a man rent asunder, even if he is a rotter. The religious man's prediction came true; his head was blown off by a trench-mortar bomb. Smoke grew thicker over the battlefield, intense artillery fire rolled, rumbled and thundered overhead and all round. Many of my comrades fell, many to rise no more. The remnant of us reached the wire which had been well cut, and flung ourselves into the German trench; it was almost obliterated, choked with debris, and splashed with the blood of the slain. The few survivors used knives, spiked clubs and knuckle-dusters, ugly weapons at close quarters. We shot and stabbed until all resistance was at an end. Two or

three of them squealed like pigs when bayoneted; I can hear them yet.

I shouted down the dug-outs: "*Kommen Sie aus sogleich!*" and the wounded, who had been sheltering in the holes, crawled out, white-faced, stained with earth and blood; in tattered clothes and clumsy boots. They held their hands aloft and were pathetically anxious to carry our wounded. Sometimes those who surrendered were spared, sometimes they were not; it depended on the temper of the attackers. It was not unusual for a soldier escorting prisoners to shoot them, and declare that a shell had fallen among them and blotted them out. In one deep dug-out I heard voices, but they refused to answer, and a shower of bombs was sent down among them. Later on when I examined that hole I found ten dead men. They had probably been too badly wounded to come out when summoned, and the bombs had finished them off. When attackers suffer heavily before reaching their objective they do not usually give quarter, owing to their natural desire to avenge the fallen.

We had orders to advance as much as possible, so worked our way up a communication trench, bombing, shooting and occasionally stabbing. The shrapnel was bursting so thickly overhead that many of my comrades dropped, and lay groaning in the trench. Our shells had killed so many Germans that they encumbered the trenches. Many had torn clothing and blackened faces, showing that the burst had been very near. The rumour went round that the German wounded were sniping at us, and we killed many of them as they lay groaning. It is possible there was some truth in the rumour; besides we were so scared and enraged that cruelty had ceased to have any meaning. We were simply doing what the instructors had told us when teaching us how to use the bayonet. Howling with feigned rage they would shout: "Look fierce, not as if you loved the bloody swine. Stick 'im in the guts until the blasted bones an' sinews crack. Rush at 'im like mad, look murderous and get the b—— before 'e gets you. Don't stick 'im as if yer were stickin' a pin in a cushion, but jab the swine until yer feel 'is backbone; fast, fierce and furious, no

mucking shilly-shally prancing round, as if yer were dancing with a tart!"

We reached some ruins and a desperate fight commenced. Machine-guns were hidden in the heaps of bricks and rubble. I followed our platoon commander, 2nd Lieutenant Douglas, until he dropped with a bullet through the heart, and I picked up his revolver and ammunition. We crawled about in the ruins, while overhead bullets sounded like the snapping of dry twigs. I found myself detached from my companions, and was debating what I should do if I suddenly came upon several Germans. My mind was working feverishly, and I was too keyed up to feel fear. Crawling round behind a heap of bricks, I discovered that it was a machine-gun emplacement, cleverly camouflaged. The gunner and his assistant had their backs to me, firing out through a slit in the wall. I pulled the pin out of a Mills bomb and quietly rolled it towards them. Before it burst I sent another to make sure.

As soon as the explosions were over I crept in, and found them still alive, but so severely wounded that they could not possibly live. They were lying in pools of blood; the face of one was shattered, his abdomen was torn to shreds. His mate was badly mangled; his back looked as if it had been flayed with razors; his clothes were bloody rags and one foot was hanging off. I gave them their quietus with Douglas's weapon.

We set to work strengthening our defences, and switched the guns round to face the other way. Several sporadic attacks were launched against us and we beat them off with difficulty; if the Germans had known how weak we were in that sector, they would have wrenched it from us, I am sure. Corporal Flinders had drunk too much rum and lay sobbing like a child. He had fought like a berserker during the attack, maddened by alcohol, but when the effects of the stimulant wore off he collapsed and was useless. Night came on, and the coloured flares going up from both sides made the night hideous. One of our men was badly burned by a flare which fell on his back while he was dozing. He jumped up and danced, yelling furiously while his back burned; we put it out with sand-bags.

Another man was hit in the face by splinters from a bomb. He was sans teeth, sans eyes, sans nose, sans everything, but a bloody spongy mess where his features had been. He lived until dawn. In the middle of the night I crawled out with Sergeant Walters to find what patrols the enemy had out, and whether the trench in front, which had been strangely quiet for some time, was occupied. The ground was bare and we wriggled along like eels, and all went well until I kicked a tin. For a moment I felt like diving for a shell-hole, but the bursts of bullets warned me to keep low. Waning Vêry lights fell and spluttered out near us ; whizz-bangs dug savagely into the ground ; heavy shells from long-range guns roared overhead, their flight seemed interminable. The artillery on both sides seemed rather uncertain of the new front lines, and we were caught between two fires. The slightest sound under such circumstances becomes significant ; never were eyes and ears so wide awake, for failure to take full advantage of their warnings usually meant death in No-Man's Land.

Suddenly Walters crawled near me and whispered : " Look over there on the right ; they are coming this way."

I looked and saw four figures ; two were tall and two short.

" Let's shoot three and grab a prisoner," whispered the sergeant.

We decided to spare the slightest one—a mere boy apparently—and shoot the others. They came nearer and my heart thumped, for to miss would be fatal.

When they were about five yards off Walters whispered : " Now ! " and we let fly at them. Two dropped dead, but, before we could fire again, the other two went down also and fired. I shot one through the face, but the other one got the sergeant with a bullet through the chest. I realized it was touch and go. Lying flat, with Douglas's Webley loaded in five chambers at arm's length, I decided to try to bluff my enemy into thinking I was dead, so that sooner or later he would raise himself to investigate.

Events turned out as I expected. He started to wriggle forward, raising his head and shoulders about a foot. When there was no possibility of missing I fired, and blew off the

bottom of his face. He was so near that his beard was badly singed and his face blackened. The mouth and lower jaw were shattered ; the bullet had come out through the back of the neck, smashing the spine.

One of the dead Germans was a boy of about eighteen. His pay-book said twenty, but he had probably put on his age, for his features were extremely childish. Of the other two, one was a young officer, the other an N.C.O. aged about thirty, a fine figure of a man.

A flare fell near me, and a burst of firing made me keep as flat as a snake. I got back to the trench a little before dawn, and was so exhausted that I fell asleep at once. It seemed to me only a few seconds after I closed my eyes when a corporal dug me in the ribs for stand-to. Jerry started bombarding us with a *minnenwerfer*, and gave us hell until noon. We could see the huge bomb sailing through the air, and rushed away as fast as we could from the spot where it was going to fall. First we raced to the left, then to the right, like hunted rabbits. Each explosion made a hole into which a horse and cart would have gone easily. It seemed hours before a message could be sent back, with the map reference of the mortar that was doing so much damage. We asked for its destruction. Great was our joy when a perfect tornado of shells whistled and screamed overhead, shooting with terrific velocity into the German trench. Great clouds, posts, sand-bags, and debris of all kinds went flying up in the air. As I watched, I saw the body of a man rise a couple of yards above the trench, and disappear again ; a shell must have burst directly beneath him. Jerry sent up red and green lights, and his artillery plastered the ground round us with four-twos and five-nines, but most of them missed, and in any case we had got rid of the mortar. It would have wiped out the whole lot of us before night, at the rate it was going.

We had an anxious time after dark, and our relief was unbounded when the relieving company came up. We were a bedraggled crew, most of us having nothing beyond a rifle, a couple of bandoliers of ammunition round our necks and a gas helmet. I had bandaged a badly wounded man with my puttees, and had torn my clothes badly on

the wire. We were dirty, unkempt and haggard. Many of us wore blood-stained bandages over slight wounds on hands or faces. As we stumbled on a warning was passed back to keep to the left, and then I saw a number of bodies, about twenty in all, covered with blankets. In a sunken road we met two other small groups, and I realized that, out of about seven hundred men in the battalion who had gone over the top, barely a hundred remained. We slept on the bare earth, with shells dropping uncomfortably near, but we were far too exhausted to take any notice of them.

At dawn we were lined up to answer the roll-call. We were plastered with earth, brick-dust and mud. Some had lost their steel helmets, others their gas-bags. Our faces were grey, worn, lined with fatigue and privations; youths of nineteen looked like old men. A sergeant called the roll as we faced him, a forlorn band, weary unto death. Occasionally the names of two survivors came next to each other in the list, then followed twenty or more names in succession, whose owners would never again respond to them in this world. We marched back to billets and were informed that the general complimented us on our magnificent advance and would soon give us a further chance of showing our mettle. I thought of the bloody *mêlée* in the trench, the machine-gunners in the ruins, Walters and scores of others lying dead; I felt I would like to brain the swine with red tabs and decorations, skulking miles behind the lines and sending young fools to their deaths. The youth of England and Germany were slaughtering each other. How glorious! How heroic! How proud the two countries must have been. How the historians would praise them for being such blasted fools as to take part in the dance of death!

We were on fatigues for four days burying the slain. I secured a pair of soft field boots from a young officer. It was his first experience of the trenches and a rifle grenade took half his head off.

We dug graves until our backs were stiff with bending, and threw hundreds of men into them, while a parson read the service. He had an impressive voice and I felt I wanted to weep. It was strange to be still alive, shovelling the soil over men with whom we had laughed and played cards

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a few days before. "Man that is born of a woman hath but a short time to live, and is full of misery. He cometh up and is cut down, like a flower; he fleeth as it were a shadow, and never continueth in one stay. In the midst of life we are in death; of whom may we seek for succour, but of thee, O Lord, who for our sins art justly displeased?"

Most of the dead were stiff, and we broke one man's arms to get him into the narrow trench. He was a giant, and his arms were outstretched and rigid. A good deal of thieving went on, and one night two of us spent several hours sticking together the remains of a bundle of fifty franc notes, found in the pocket of a dead German officer. A little fellow had a collection of rings taken from the dead, and did good business later on, selling them to the Australians, who were paid as much per day as we got per week.

In billets I chummed up with a tall dark individual who had come from hospital, after having served with another battalion. He was an absolute dare-devil, had been wounded three times, and had a fearful scar from his right temple across his nose to the lower part of the left jaw. It pulled his mouth somewhat out of shape and gave him a distinctly savage expression. He told me his age was twenty-seven, and that his father was a famous barrister, who had cut him off without a shilling. My new pal's name, I ascertained, was Danesford; I soon discovered also that he drank like a fish, swore like a Billingsgate porter, was a thorough reprobate and had many ways of obtaining money, the least dishonest of which was borrowing and forgetting to pay back. When I first saw him he was running a crown and anchor board with the patter and dexterity born of long practice. As unscrupulous as Panurge, he differed from the hero of Rabelais (if the word hero can be used of such a poltroon) in one important particular: he was brave to a fault.

Standing in front of his board he harangued the reluctant soldiers to throw their money on the squares. With much rattling of dice he yelled: "Come on, my lucky lads, you come here in rags and go away in motor-cars! What about the old mud-hook? Who says a flutter on the sergeant-major? The more you win the better I like you! If

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you don't speculate you can't accumulate! After the muck cart comes the Lord-Mayor's show! Don't be chicken-hearted, never say your mother bred a jibber!"

The men drew nearer, attracted by such blandishments, hoping to get rich quick. Money was thrown on the crown, and when the dice came up the crown was the winner. Danesford was broke; he had started without a cent, hoping to win a few times right from the start, but his luck was out.

I slipped him a couple of the repaired fifty-franc notes which were more than sufficient to pay the winners. At the end of the evening he had won three hundred francs, and in a few days had raked in thousands. He paid me with new notes, saying he would keep the repaired ones for luck. He invited me to celebrate the occasion, and on the Saturday night we tramped twelve miles to a village free from troops, where prices were reasonable, and the wine infinitely better than the watery beer in the canteen.

To get away from khaki and bureaucracy in the shape of officers and N.C.O's was like escaping from hell to heaven. We found a quiet back parlour, and Danesford drank a bottle of wine without taking the bottle from his mouth. "Get half drunk first, forget the bloody army and enjoy these few hours, we may not have the chance this time next week," he said quietly, placing the empty bottle on the table while I was finishing mine. "Funny to think that in a few days we may be pushing up the daisies and feeding the worms," he continued whimsically, lighting a cigarette.

"I don't see anything so bloody funny in the prospect," I retorted, rather despondent at the idea of going west after so many narrow escapes.

"Let's have a song," he cried, going to the piano. It hadn't been tuned since it was made, and the sounds it emitted were anything but musical. Danesford was not a good player but vamped fairly well. His first effort started thus:

"At Plugstreet, at Plugstreet,  
Where we all got damn cold feet,  
And the bullets hit our backsides all the way;  
And we ran, Christ, we ran,  
From the bloody Alleyman,  
And now we are happy all the day!"



An old man peeped in at the door and wheezed : "*Quelles sont les nouvelles de là-bas, mes garçons ?*"

"No bloody bon," replied my pal. In answer to a further question he shouted : "Me no compree, and clear to hell out of it."

The ancient did not withdraw and was formulating another question when Danseford roared : "*Foutez-moi le camp, nom de Dieu ! ou je vous casserai la gueule !*"

The intruder drew back hastily and shut the door.

"He's probably a bloody spy," muttered my comrade, "the place is full of them." I tried to find out something about Danesford's life by tactful questions, but he wasn't giving much away.

After awhile he said : "Look here, Saint-Mandé, you wonder what the hell I am, and whether I'm respectable. Well, as we may be pals for a time, perhaps it's only fair that you should know what sort of a scallaway I am. It's a long story, and for ten years I've been a rolling stone. At the age of seventeen I was in my third year at public school and doing well at games ; I hated books like hell. If my old man had had the sense to listen to my plea he would have trained me for some outdoor occupation, but he knew better, and I had to stick at school, where I developed the vicious tendencies that were no doubt dormant in my nature. You see, my mother was an actress, beautiful body and all that, but a worthless woman. My father married her for her beauty and she gave him hell. Finally they separated and he retained custody of me. I had my mother's lecherous disposition, and had slept with all the servants before I was sixteen. The fat was in the fire when one of them had a child and swore it was mine. It may have been, God only knows. Anyhow, she had witnesses that I had spent the night in her room, and my old man was as wild as hell. He gave the girl a sum of money in full settlement and packed me off to South Africa. I stayed there for five years and lost every penny I had. There are a few spots there where farming pays, but on the whole the country is a miserable drought-stricken place. Then locusts and disease take their toll. I had blackwater fever in the Belgian Congo, malaria

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in Natal, and was bitten by a poisonous snake in the Transvaal."

I had been thinking of going to South Africa after the war and wanted to find out all I could about it, so I asked him what the prospects were in that sunny land. "For an Englishman, nil," he answered with conviction. "The Dutchman hates us like hell and will never forgive. I saw the closing stages of the South African war and admired the Boer as a clean fighter. But there my admiration ends. He will never learn anything and will never forget anything. He is ruled by the *predikants* and they are the bloody limit. Narrow-minded, intolerant, selfish, harsh and unspiritual, they rule the dorps with a rod of iron. They have as much power as the Catholic priests in Ireland. Britain conquered the Boers and then set out to civilize and educate them. A few years after beating them, we handed their country over to them, and they show their gratitude by staging a full-blown rebellion when the empire is fighting for her life. After having solemnly signed the peace treaty and the Act of Union they treat them as scraps of paper. Smuts and Botha are the only leaders who are worth anything, and they will be hated for suppressing the rebellion, mark my words.

"Even if the Boer fought fair in the South African War, he has made up for it since, with his tales about British atrocities in the concentration camps. Doctors and nurses worked with a devotion beyond all praise to teach the backvelders the elements of hygiene, and were accused of poisoning the milk and putting fish-hooks in the meat. The back-veld Boer bathes only for baptism, marriage and burial. He has no notions about sanitation and often uses his bedroom as a latrine. We had to destroy the farms, as they were the bases of the Boer commandos, and the war would never had ended if the supply-bases had not been cut off. Any other modern power would have done the same. If France or Germany had conquered South Africa there would have been no language problem. You see, the original Dutch settlers in the country, known as Voortrekkers, were, on the whole, a pretty poor lot. Many were illiterate boers, surly and morose. Their favourite pastime was

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begetting children, both with their wives and their numerous black concubines.

"To-day the Dutch South African depicts the Voortrekkers as saints persecuted by the British. The truth is that they resented any form of government and cleared off as soon as they saw the smoke of another man's chimney on the horizon. Pieter Retief and the other leaders disclaimed all allegiance to Britain, and in the same declaration promised to uphold the first principles of liberty, and proceeded to enslave every black man they could get hold of. The white man's record in South Africa is a record of theft, murder, and oppression. The descendants of the Voortrekkers are the 'poor whites,' utterly degenerate; they despise manual labour and live worse than natives. Another enemy of the native is the white artisan who sees in him a potential competitor. The South African as a rule earns big money on the mines; his ignorant and vulgar wife thinks she is a lady and parades the streets in tawdry finery while the Kaffir does all her work. A black girl, probably, looks after the baby, so allowing Mrs. Ignoramus to have her tennis, dances, flirtations and gossip. The white worker, utterly ignorant of the first principles of economics, thinks he can only keep up his inflated wages by keeping the nigger's down."

"But what about the young South African Dutchman to-day?" I inquired; "isn't he grateful to Britain for developing the country and granting them autonomy so soon after the Boer War?"

"He is so grateful that he is doing his best to kick us out of the country. Many of them go to the States, get a cheap doctorate and an American accent, after which they return to the land of their birth, and show their gratitude to their mentors by doing everything in their power to get rid of them. Things are bad enough at present, but they will get a damn sight worse before many years. Besides the country is infested with Jews; it has been well said that the arms of South Africa should represent a cow, with a Boer holding the tail, and an Englishman at the head, with a Jew underneath milking it."

"What about the missionaries?" I further queried; "haven't they done good work?"

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"They certainly have, but their labours have by no means proved an unmixed blessing. There have been some fine men among them, but many fools. Besides, they are trying to force an abstract religion down the nigger's throat and he cannot understand it. All he learns is that he will always be forgiven, so the so-called Christian native is usually the biggest liar and thief you could find. The white Christians in South Africa are most amusing. Their attitude to the native is worse than that of any pagan. They live in a perpetual state of fear that one day the black man will swamp them."

At that point in the narrative Danesford saw a pretty wench in the next room and went out to her. He stood her some drinks and I could see he had made a conquest. He was a fine, tall, broad-shouldered man, and the scar gave him the finishing touch. He came back and said he was going to spend the night with his charmer. "Don't be a fool!" I exclaimed; "we may be ordered up the line early in the morning and you will be posted as a deserter. Go with her for an hour or two and then we'll clear off back."

He agreed to my suggestion and went away. I peeped over a little curtain that covered the glass part of the door on the left and saw a girl sewing near a lamp. She was about twenty, and, although not remarkably good-looking, had a fine complexion and beautiful golden hair. I knocked at the door and went in. The girl looked up in surprise and smiled when she saw me, for she had served us with wine earlier in the evening.

"*Que désirez-vous, monsieur ?*" inquired Manon (for such, I discovered later, was her name).

"*Mademoiselle, permettez-moi de m'asseoir auprès de vous pour contempler et admirer la beauté de votre visage. Quand vous êtes venue nous servir j'ai aussitôt chuchoté à mon ami : 'Voici la plus belle fille de France !' et toute la soirée je ne fais que penser à vous avec une tendresse extrême.*"

"*Quelle blague !*" she exclaimed, blushing with pleasure at the abject flattery she had just heard.

There was a book of music on the piano. Turning over the leaves I found a song from "*Le Barbier de Seville*" and accompanied myself while I sang.

The girl's mother came in and looked inquiringly at her daughter, who calmly said: "*Ma mère, nous sommes très honorées ; le père de Monsieur est duc et excessivement riche,*" and she introduced me to her mother as the Count of something or other. The portly matron withdrew with a curtsy and I asked Manon why she had told such a story, whereupon she told me that her mother had made a pile of money, and, like Monsieur Jourdain, was determined to marry her daughter to some one with a title. The old woman had evidently been impressed, for she left us alone for nearly two hours, which Manon and I enjoyed to the full. She was a spirited girl, but the strict chaperonage of her mother made life irksome in the extreme. Manon was full of devil, and, although she pretended at first to be shy, I could see she was as hungry as I for caresses. When I tried to kiss her she covered her face with her abundant hair, but allowed me to take her in my arms. We kissed furiously, pulling the blind on the door so that prying eyes might not see. Manon pulled my "*Travels with a Donkey*" from my pocket and read in halting English :

"We travelled in the print of olden wars ;  
Yet all the land was green ;  
And love we found, and peace  
Where fire and war had been."

I translated the passage for her, and we wandered out into the orchard, where we found a rustic seat, and cuddled while a nightingale poured out its gorgeous notes that floated over

"The grass, the thicket, and the fruit-tree wild ;  
White hawthorn and the pastoral eglantine ;  
Fast-fading violets cover'd up in leaves ;  
The coming musk-rose, full of dewy wine,  
The murmurous haunt of flies on summer's eves."

The muffled roar of countless guns sounding the requiem of stricken youth made me redouble the ardour of my embraces, and Manon responded as the strings of an instrument respond to the musician's touch. In a breathing space between our passionate raptures, she asked me why

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I was so impetuous, and I replied in the words of old Ronsard :

*"Vivez, si m'en croyez, n'attendez à demain :  
Cueillez dès aujourd'hui les roses de la vie."*

We returned to the house, to find Danesford fighting with a lout, who had shouted that the English soldiers were no good, and that the next war would be between France and England. The yokel had no chance, and threw up the sponge after having acted as receiver-in-chief for a few minutes. Blood flew freely from his nose and mouth, but he was not seriously injured. There was a good deal of hostility to us among the French "*populo*," probably due to the fact that the exploits of men like Marlborough and Wellington still rankled in certain bosoms. We bought a couple of bottles of wine to fortify us on the road, and set off after I had kissed Manon repeatedly behind the door.

The moon shone bright and we sang as we walked. My pal sang a number of obscene songs until we discovered something we both knew and bellowed it lustily.

We reached billets at dawn and discovered a great commotion ; a sergeant had been murdered. He had been a tyrant, and several men had sworn to do him in when they got the chance. I was in no way sorry for the victim ; he deserved what he got, and I would cheerfully have put a bullet through him myself. The C.O. tried a kind of third degree, but the culprit was never discovered. It is surely too much to expect men to kill the enemy, and at the same time submit to the vicious bullying of an unprincipled scoundrel.

A shot had been heard in the night, and the sergeant was found lying in a pool of blood, with a hole in his head. The officers and N.C.O.s were bent on vindicating authority, the men were sullen, but the inquiry was abortive.

The following evening we were ordered up the line again. We shouldered our packs in sullen angry silence, for those who had come through the last tragic farce could not be expected to enthuse over a repetition of it. The papers out from home contained reports of villages captured, and readers were regaled with the usual falsehoods about the

troops' anxiety to go over the top as often as possible. How many parents will never know what happened in those dark days, when thousands of men were sacrificed for a blasted strip of worthless land.

We dumped our packs in Albert and marched in silence, sniffing the sweat from many bodies and watching the bursting shells on the crest. From time to time a big shell fell perilously near and we all dropped flat. We heard the gun-fire, then the distant hum of the projectile, which increased to a hellish roar as it approached and dropped on or near the road; the wait between the report of the gun and the burst of the shell was agonizing and horrible in the extreme. One wanted to run like mad, and one had to march ever nearer the scene of carnage and destruction. Just before we reached the communication trench, the company in front suffered severely from a direct hit which killed and wounded fifteen men.

There was hardly any confusion. The dead were placed at the side of the road, the wounded were carried to the rear, a sharp word of command was given, and on we went. I looked at the dead, bloody lumps of mangled flesh and tattered rags. Artillery teams and lorries forced us into the ditches among the dead; wounded were coming down from the trenches, some on stretchers, others walking. As I passed a dug-out, in which artillery officers were sitting on boxes, their gramophone shrieked a song entitled "Bad as you are I love you," and we looked with envious eyes at the whisky on the table.

We spoke in undertones, and scanned the ground to avoid tripping over obstacles. In actual battle I had few qualms and killed as fiercely as anyone, but before an attack my nerves were all on edge. I realized I was too philosophic and meditative to make a good soldier. No longer could I think of political or other questions in the abstract. To many, war meant sticking pins with flags attached into maps of the front. To me and my mates, it meant weary haggard men with drawn faces, marching to the trenches, whence the survivors returned more weary and pitiful, repeating the process until the soul grew weary and sick and rebellious.

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We had become bitter, morose, cynical, scornful, irritable, irreligious and disillusioned. I sometimes recollected bits of Xenophon's *Anabasis* and wondered if the Greeks in their memorable retreat had ever felt as bitter and weary as I. As we plodded on our guide lost us, and the C.O. struck him just as Cheirisophus did that unfortunate guide in those far-off days. I paid scant attention to the remarks of my comrades, the whine of bullets and crash of shells monopolized my attention. I was wondering what fate was keeping in store, and whether Atropos was preparing to sever the thread of my life. Much as I hated killing I resolved to fight like a tiger to preserve my life. It was the suspense that unnerved me.

Our front line was near what had once been a village, but which was now a mass of ruins. It was a moonlight night, and I lay on a board looking up at the cloudless sky. I was extremely depressed and could not sleep. Danesford crept out and sat near me. We discussed gravely our chances of survival, and promised to help each other in case of need. Orders had been issued to leave the wounded, but we usually ignored them. After talking for an hour, we went into the dug-out and found some cigarettes, which we smoked, sitting up in the midst of our sleeping comrades. Soon my pal dropped off to sleep and I fished out a copy of Lessing's "Laocoon," that I had taken from a dead German. It fascinated me and I repeated to myself several times: "As the depths of the sea always remain calm, however violently the surface may rage, so the expression in the figures of the Greeks, under every form of passion, shows a great and self-collected soul. . . . Laocoon suffers, but he suffers as the Philoctetes of Sophocles. His misery pierces us to the very soul, but inspires us with a wish that we could endure misery like that great man," and I resolved to take my gruel without whining. As a gentle breeze wafted the stink of corpses over the trench, I wondered if the stench from Philoctetes' wound had been as bad as the polluted air we breathed daily.

I fell into a fitful slumber and dreamt I was in Dante's seventh circle, watching the rulers undergoing torment in a river of blood.



I was awakened long before dawn, and we fixed bayonets while the shells flew overhead like flocks of giant birds. A man standing near me gave me his wife's name and address scribbled on a scrap of paper. I promised to write to her if he were killed. He was a quiet chap, gentle and reserved. He had been a clerk in Hull. When the whistle blew we went up and over. Jerry's shooting was as accurate as ever, and once more our ranks were thinned before we had gone very far. A piece of shrapnel took off the clerk's right arm and he dropped. He survived the war, I am glad to say.

My company reached a cemetery and received orders to dig in. We were a miserable remnant of those who had sprung to the attack only a few minutes before. The cries and groans of the wounded filled the air, but we could do nothing for them until things quietened down a little. Many of the graves had been burst open by shells, and it was said that Jerry had stripped them for lead. The ground was churned up by enormous projectiles and heaved like waves.

We crouched in the graves among the bones and broken coffins. Five-nines were dropping so near that we expected to be buried alive. Danesford and I were huddled together in the same vault, thanking our lucky stars that it was deep. We lit cigarettes, and my hands trembled as I struck the match, for a coal-box blew in a mass of earth and shook us badly. My companion picked up a skull and solemnly recited Hamlet's speech beginning: "Alas, poor Yorick!"

We hung on for four days, during which we suffered much from scarcity of food and water. A wounded man near our hole moaned so much that we dragged him in, but he died soon afterwards, and was beginning to smell when we were relieved, after gaining about a hundred yards. An hour before dawn we reached Albert and were lodged in cellars. After breakfast the rumour went round that we were going out for a long rest, but that particular rumour was a lying jade, for that same night we went in again, the enemy having counter-attacked and recovered some of the lost ground.

As we were supposed to have a good reputation we were

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chosen to have the honour of depriving the enemy of his gains. We were tired, ragged, dirty and unshaven, and when we heard the news, the powers controlling our destinies were cursed with all the emphasis at our command. It was not surprising, for we were done-up, and our morale, although still fairly dependable, had been severely shaken. The prevailing mood was one of depression, for we had again lost very heavily, and felt we deserved a rest. We were absolutely convinced that, after a few more frontal attacks, there would not be a sound man left in the battalion.

Danesford and I were sitting in a cellar, our chins on our knees, cursing our rotten luck. Suddenly my pal said in a quiet voice: "I wonder if people will ever realize that there is nothing glorious in war, nothing chivalrous, nothing admirable. It is madness, it is murder, the frenzied slaughter of man by man, the destruction of our noblest and best, the turning of decent men into diabolical murderers and foul-mouthed ruffians. If mothers and sisters all over Europe realized how their sons and brothers are debased morally and spiritually, how all that is noble is destroyed by the blood-lust, they would work for peace, I am convinced. But they have been taught that war is glorious, and that myth will be hard to kill."

## CHAPTER XVII

WE went up again at dusk and lay out in the open. Gaps were cut in the German wire, and, although the shelling was heavy, it was not well directed, and we got off lightly.

A little before dawn the signal was given, and with a rush we were in the trench. I landed on top of a sentry who must have been worn out by lack of sleep. He fell under me, but showed fight, so I shot him in the chest. His head was more or less covered by a steel helmet which came off in the struggle, and I saw that my victim was a mere boy. The scuffles were short and bloody. Bombs were as usual hurled down the dug-outs and a few bleeding survivors gave themselves up. We bombed our way up a communication trench, losing several men on the way. Finch, a little regular who had been wounded four times, was shot in the head and dropped like a stone. Many young Germans were lying dead in those trenches. They looked like students, tall, fair, with intelligent faces. When we reached a barricade our officer, a young chap named Evans, with more courage than discretion, jumped up on top of it waving his revolver. He was promptly riddled and his body knocked me flat as it fell back. We threw all the bombs we could gather and received a shower in reply.

We set to work to strengthen our position and I discovered that, as senior private, I was again in command. Danesford had been hit on the head by a rifle butt, and was temporarily out of action. I sent back a runner with a message explaining our plight, and we fired at any target, until a sergeant and his crew appeared with a Stokes mortar, and began sending over a perfect hail of bombs. With a periscope we discovered the machine-gun emplacement and were able to smash gun and gunner with a direct hit. Rushing the

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barrier we charged over a heap of dead, and reached the reserve trenches which were our objectives. The Stokes gun blasted its way forward, and at midday we reached our final objective. Reinforcements and machine-guns arrived, the gains were consolidated, and we lay behind our rifles utterly exhausted. Our losses had again been heavy and only seven remained of my platoon.

A lull came over the battle, and those of us who were not on sentry-duty hunted for souvenirs in the trench. Most of the Germans had been killed by shell-fire, and were already stiff and yellow, just like figures in a waxwork show. One big fellow was showing his teeth; the look on his face was that of concentrated horror. Another young Jerry of powerful build was flattened in a mass of congealed blood; his bowels were exposed and attracted swarms of flies. A middle-aged man lay on his face with the back of his head battered in. His clothes had been torn off by the force of the explosion, and one of his kidneys had been trodden on. Near him were the ghastly remains of a fair youth. The right arm had been torn off, the legs were in pulp and the pelvis shattered.

Those men must have been dead for some days and the smell was atrocious. The day was hot and flies were a plague. It was necessary to keep low on account of sniping, so we ate our rations among mutilated corpses, stinks, and flies that alighted on our faces after crawling over the latrines and bloody remains. We had become extraordinarily callous, and searched the dead without reverence, even when decomposition had set in. One man put on his gas mask to penetrate into a dug-out full of putrefaction, and secured some watches and rings. I saw a fellow, who had never seen battle before, hacking off the swollen finger of a dead officer to get a gold ring. They argued that it was foolish to bury money or jewellery, and that if they didn't rob the dead someone else would, which was probably true. They felt that what they got from dead enemies was legitimate booty.

Such acts are revolting, but not as revolting as killing men. As Greenling used to say, what happens after stabbing or shooting a man doesn't matter a damn. Blame

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rather the system that turned decent fellows into ghouls, and let us recognize that men who are taught to kill, plunder and desecrate whenever they get the chance. One of the dead men had a gold bangle on the upper part of his left arm. It was inscribed with a loving message from his wife. All I remember of the message is the word "Glück" which stood apart from the other words. The arm was swollen and discoloured. One man hacked away at the flesh and secured the souvenir, which brought him no luck either, for he was blown to smithereens by a big shell next day.

The planes were busy overhead, and almost every day two or three of them came tumbling down like falling leaves, usually bursting into flames before they reached the ground. Some fell like stones, and burst into flames when the petrol tank burst on impact. Many were burnt out long before hitting the ground, owing, no doubt, to the tank being hit by incendiary bullets, which were red-hot and streaked through the air like sparks. No adequate tribute will ever be paid to the men who fought over the lines every day without parachutes, and who knew that, almost inevitably, their end would be a flaming dive to earth, and an impact that would break the charred fragments beyond recognition. I helped to dig out one plane that had buried itself about three feet in the ground. It was a blackened, twisted mass of metal, and when it cooled sufficiently we dug out two black lumps of roasted flesh; it was impossible to tell which was pilot and which observer; we buried them in one grave.

As we lay in our stinking trench two planes fought overhead and displayed amazing skill. They dived and circled at fantastic speeds, slipped sideways and backwards, blazing at each other whenever anything got in front of the machine-gun sights. The fight lasted about fifteen minutes, and then the German appeared to be hit. He drove his plane straight at his adversary, the machines became locked together and dropped in flames.

We remained in that position another three days, and drove off some half-hearted attacks. I think Jerry was reserving his strength, for our situation was not very secure,

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and a determined rush in force after a heavy bombardment would have dislodged us; our losses had left us weak and we were nearly exhausted.

When we were relieved, we marched back past the huge mine crater in Sausage Valley, and again occupied the cellars in Albert. After two days there, we were sent up again, to occupy a small quarry near the front line, so that we would be available when the attack came. I was lying down in the sun trying to snatch a little sleep when Danesford shouted that I was wanted. Looking up I saw an infantry man, covered with dry mud, unshaven, and extremely dirty. He was mopping his brow, on which sweat and dirt had gathered, and I could see he was a bomber. His general appearance was that of a man who had just come out of the front line after a bad time.

"I'm Saint-Mandé," I said, for I did not recognize the fellow, "what do you want?"

"Wilfred, don't you know me?" answered the stranger, and I jumped to my feet in my excitement, for the voice was that of my brother Alfred.

Good God, what a shock I had! We shook hands and could hardly speak. He could stay only a short time, for his battalion was going out to rest, and he would have to run to catch up. He had heard that my company was in the neighbourhood and had located me after some inquiries. We agreed to try to meet in Albert or the vicinity, if both were out at the same time. He told me that Duncan was in the same company but had been left in Albert on account of sickness. We tried to be cheerful, shook hands again with a tremendous grip, and he disappeared down the trench. I hated to think of both my brothers being on that part of the front, for it was hell, and we had had several pairs of brothers wiped out.

At dawn next day the enemy attack commenced, and we moved up through a very heavy barrage to reinforce our front line. Our losses were not heavy going up, for the trench was deep, and most of the shells missed it.

Unfortunately the officer in charge was a prize idiot, for instead of letting us shelter in the dug-outs, whence we could have emerged in a few seconds as soon as the infantry

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attack started, he kept us standing crowded together in the trench, and we lost about a third of our effectives before Jerry came at us. That officer was too inexperienced and flustered to be of any use, and I was glad when he got wounded; he crawled away and left an efficient sergeant in charge.

After an hour the barrage lifted, and we saw the field-grey figures swarming over the top. They got what we had been met with so often, and under our withering fire they melted away like snow before a furnace. A Lewis gunner near me dropped with a gurgle, having been shot through the face, and I snatched his gun. With great deliberation I emptied plate after plate into the advancing line, sweeping the gun from side to side and catching them waist high; they went down like cut corn. Not one escaped. The nearest Germans fell about ten yards from our trench, and it was touch and go for a few minutes.

We reloaded and cooled the guns, while the groans of the wounded rose from No Man's Land in a dismal requiem. A few enemy stretcher-bearers climbed furtively into view, and grew bolder when they saw we did not intend firing. One lout near me cried: "Come on, lads, no quarter!" and fired. The sergeant at once felled him with his fist.

The wounded were all gathered in by noon, and it was curious to watch the Germans bringing their stretchers close to our trench, to gather some of their comrades who screamed and groaned with pain. The bulk of the fallen needed no attention, they were as dead as mutton. I was glad the wounded had been collected, for sometimes when neither side would stop firing they lay for days suffering indescribable agonies, from the untended wounds, thirst, and exposure to rain and sun. One of our men wanted to stick up a board with some insults in German on it, but the sergeant would not allow it. They sometimes stuck up, "Come on, Tommy, we are ready for you," but it seemed more dignified not to imitate such an example.

Two days later we were relieved and marched back to Albert. In the centre of the town I saw a familiar figure at a street corner and could hardly believe my eyes when my brother, Duncan, turned and looked in my direction.

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I obtained permission to fall out, and ran to greet him. When he saw me his eyes filled with tears, and he told me in a sobbing voice that Alfred was missing. When Alfred saw me he thought he was going out for a rest, but his battalion had been ordered in again to retake some lost ground, and had suffered heavy losses; the bombers had been wiped out.

I had to run away to overtake my company, and when we reached billets a mile beyond Albert I saw Captain Ray, our company commander, and obtained two days' leave. I got a lift on a lorry and found Duncan in a cellar. The survivors of the attack knew nothing except that they had charged against uncut wire and had been mown down like sheep. They indicated roughly on a map the spot where they had been annihilated, and I made up my mind to examine the ground as soon as possible. Many of the dead were lying in a new cemetery that was only a week old, but already contained about two thousand graves. We visited dressing-stations and casualty clearing stations, but could learn nothing definite about our missing brother. I had scribbled a few lines to my mother just after meeting Alfred, and now had to write the terrible news that he had gone. I was certain he was dead, for in an attack of that kind against wire there would be practically no prisoners.

I could not sleep at night, and left Duncan with a heavy heart, for I knew he would soon have to go into the holocaust again. I rejoined my company at Saint-Ange and went about like a man in a stupor for a few days, then I accompanied Danesford to an inn and got blind drunk. We were refitting, drilling all day, and attacking positions with the bayonet.

One day Ray sent for me, and informed me that, in view of my record, he could not understand why I was a private, and asked me if I desired promotion.

"The fact is, sir, I'm fed up to the teeth with soldiering, and since my heart isn't in it, perhaps it would be better for me to remain a private," I replied, looking him in the eyes.

"Do you think you are the only soldier who is sick of the whole business?" he queried; "we are all fed up, as



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you term it, but we've got to see it through. It isn't much use reasoning with your enemy while he's running at you with the intention of murdering you. It's all very well for well-intentioned pacifists to tell us how horrible it is to murder fellow men, but we've no option until the Germans are beaten. I have a wife and three children whom I have seen four times in two years, and I hate war with a fiendish hatred, but, unless the menace is cleared, we shall have another war in our time, and it is in the darkest hour that we must be most tenacious."

I agreed with what he said, partly because it seemed to me sound, and partly because I did not like putting forward my views about rascally rulers and politicians gulling the youth of Europe. I respected Ray as a man and a leader. He was efficient and made his officers work; besides, he treated us as men, not as dogs. In the end I agreed to accept promotion, and the same evening was posted as corporal.

Two days later the captain again sent for me, and told me he was going to Amiens to do some shopping for the mess, and as he wanted to spend as much time as possible with his wife, who was in the town, he suggested that I should do the buying and have a little holiday at the same time. I asked permission to take a man and it was granted. Next morning Ray set out mounted with his servant; Danesford and I drove in the mess cart. When we reached the town I was given money and the shopping list, with instructions to meet my C.O. in two days' time at noon outside the Grand Hotel.

My pal and I found a modest hostelry, and, after putting the horse in charge of an ostler, set out to explore the town. Some houses had been damaged, but on the whole the place had not suffered very much. The cathedral was almost hidden by sand-bags, so it was impossible to tell how much that edifice had suffered. We returned with new shirts, socks, and bath salts; stripped, and had a gorgeous bath. When one is accustomed to bathing regularly such a statement means little or nothing. But to throw off a filthy shirt, to enjoy hot water and plenty of it, after bathing in a bucket of cold! We soaped each

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other and played in the perfumed water, until the host called out that our dinner was ready. We ate until we nearly burst, and had as much wine as we could drink without getting helpless. We discussed life, love, war, and the prospects of peace. My friend looked at me while I developed my favourite thesis, namely that it was idiotic for millions of peace-loving men to slaughter each other, at the behest of emperors and kings, politicians and prelates.

It was like a respite from hell to contemplate peaceful town life again, and to walk about without the fear of being blown to atoms at any minute. As we crossed a square a tyre burst and we dropped flat from force of habit. As soon as we realized what it was, we laughed heartily at our exhibition of "wind-up," and were glad that only a decrepit *concierge* had witnessed our performance. Walking along the canal bank, we passed a row of houses that appeared to be the abodes of prostitutes. Doors were open, and females in their underwear called to us to come and "*faire l'amour*." We went over, but they were of the lowest class, and looked horrible at close quarters. There was something so coarse and vulgar about their mode of offering their wares, that, in spite of our desire, we had no difficulty in resisting their blandishments.

"I once slept with a woman of that class," said my companion as we passed on; "I was drunk and when I woke up sober in the morning I thought of the words of Baudelaire:

*'Quand elle eut de mes os sucé toute la moelle,  
Et que languissamment je me tournai vers elle  
Pour lui rendre un baiser d'amour, je ne vis plus  
Qu'une outre aux flancs gluants, toute pleine de pus.'*

We arrived at a café in front of which sat a harlot sipping her wine. She was attractive, and Danesford suggested taking her in turns. I did not relish the idea, and told him to go with her if he wished, and I would find another elsewhere. I left him with her and went on down the street. In the Grande Rue there were plenty of prostitutes but none appealed to me. Turning off into a quiet street,

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I was passing a house when I happened to look at the window, and saw a pretty girl beckon to me. I opened the door, and with a smile she said: "*Viens, mon chéri,*" and led me upstairs. The *patronne*, an elderly woman, was ironing in a back room. On each landing was a *filles publique*, reading or sewing, and awaiting clients. My guide took me to her room and slipped off her dress, standing in pale blue knickers.

"*Attendez, mon ami, combien allez-vous me donner ?*" she asked.

"*Combien voulez-vous ?*" I parried.

She intimated that she wanted fifty francs and I remembered that I had nothing but a hundred-franc note in my pocket.

"*Avez-vous de la monnaie ?*" I asked.

"*Donnez-le moi, je vais la chercher,*" she replied.

I had heard sinister tales about those *maisons de tolérance* and grew rather uneasy. Soldiers spoke of men who had been robbed by the *souteneur*, and even thrown into a back lane, after having been knocked on the head and stripped. After a little deliberation I decided to get out of the place, and marched downstairs in spite of the caresses and entreaties of Suzanne.

After a drink in the inn where we had booked a room I decided that my fears were groundless. The beautifully shaped, silk-encased legs of Suzanne danced before me, and the desire to pass the night with her overcame all my scruples. I thought I could easily find the house again, but had forgotten to note the name of the street, and the number of the house. Search as I would it eluded me, and at length I had to give it up, cursing myself for having been such a fool. Wandering aimlessly about, I came to a house in front of which two women were sitting. One of them greeted me with:

"*Est-ce que le poilu désire une gentille petite femme ?*"

"*Ca dépend,*" I replied, stopping to look at them. They were about thirty and looked like twins. It seemed to me that they were amateurs, for they were not painted. Two or three children were playing in the house, and I asked the women why they were on the game.

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"*Que voulez-vous, la vie est chère : il faut bien vivre,*" exclaimed the prettier of the two.

"*Mais où est votre mari ?*" I queried.

"*A la sacrée guerre comme tous les autres, sauf les embusqués,*" she answered. The plain one wanted to accompany me upstairs, and had risen for that purpose, but I wanted the pretty one and gained my point. We went into a bedroom and I handed over a few francs. I had taken off my jacket when I was seized by some strange scruples. Whether it was fear of disease, or simply disgust at the mercenary transaction I knew not. It may have been that the woman didn't look too clean, and her clothes were thick and coarse. The room was rather sordid, and I felt I could not enjoy female contact under such circumstances. The woman asked me why I was waiting, and I answered that I had forgotten something, but would return immediately. As I rushed out of the house the woman at the door shouted something after me. All I heard was :

"*Qu'y a-t-il ?*"

"*Il n'y a rien, je vais revenir,*" I muttered and fled.

Once more I repaired to a café and ordered half a bottle of Moselle. I sat with it at a table reading the latest German atrocities in *Le Temps* and wondering how the public could swallow such piffle. As I finished the second glass, a young woman came in, with an empty bottle and a shopping basket. While the *patron* was filling the bottle, the girl looked at me, and her eyes seemed sympathetic. It may have been due to the effects of the wine, but I thought her glance implied an invitation, and when she left the shop I rose and followed her. She looked round and turned the corner. After crossing several streets she went into a quiet *épicerie* and I stepped in behind her. As I shut the door the girl asked :

"*Pourquoi me suivez-vous ?*"

"*Parce que vous avez un air sympathique. Je ne connais personne dans la ville et voudrais causer avec une personne comme vous,*" I answered rather lamely.

"*Vous êtes en permission alors ?*"

"*Pour deux jours seulement.*"

"*Venez prendre une tasse de café dans l'arrière-boutique.*"

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We went into the little room behind the shop, and over a cup of coffee, to which a nice *goutte* had been added, exchanged confidences. Her name was Julie Michon, her mother was dead, and her father serving as a territorial near Verdun. Julie was looking after the business until he returned. The girl had received a good education and spoke a little English with a pretty French accent. I tried to kiss her, but she pointed to the upper part of the door, through which one could see into the shop, and said a customer might come in at any moment. I suggested going upstairs, but she pointed out that the windows of the house opposite overlooked her bedroom, and she would have to draw the blinds, which would arouse suspicion. Finally we went down to the cellar, where a couch had been installed in case of air raids. I took her on my knee and kissed her with a warmth that showed the eagerness of my desire. I was like a thirsty traveller who comes unexpectedly on a spring and drinks feverishly. I buried my face in her hair and hugged her fiercely, thrilled at the contact of a lovely female form. I had to desist when the shop bell rang and Julie had to go upstairs. When she returned, we arranged to meet at the inn where I had my room, and I went out with a parcel under my arm so that prying neighbours would, if they saw me, think I had been shopping.

I awaited Julie with some impatience, for I half feared she would not turn up. I was reading a paper when the door opened and she entered, radiant and smiling. We had dinner in a corner screened off from the public gaze. I left a note for Danesford and we left, taking a stroll in the cool air before returning to Julie's home. It was late when we reached it and the street was deserted. Her room was tastefully furnished in blue. The paper was blue like the cushions, and a blue reading-lamp stood on a little table near the bed. After our first transports we lay in bed discussing poetry. Julie was fond of Verlaine and recited some of his poems. Next day I went and did the shopping, returning to Julie at night. We kissed and loved until dawn. After breakfast I bought, in town, a beautifully bound copy of Verlaine's poems.

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Julie wept when I gave it to her, and made me promise to return to her if possible. She made me a present of a little collection of poems in which she had written

*"Beau chevalier qui partez pour la guerre  
Qu'allez-vous faire si loin de nous ?  
J'en vais pleurer, moi qui me laissais dire  
Que mon sourire  
Était si doux."*

I found Danesford at the hotel, half drunk. He asked me what sort of a woman I had found, and all I could say was that I respected her too much to talk about her. That made him laugh and he called me a cute blighter.

We met Ray at noon and he handed over some packages to be put in the cart. His wife was a pretty frail little creature and wept bitterly. Her brother had just left school and was joining the company as a second lieutenant. I felt sorry for the poor woman with husband and brother in the Somme inferno. We left them when all the parcels had been placed in the cart and drove off. As soon as we got clear of the town, Danesford pulled out a bottle and finished it, after giving me a pull at it. He could stand an extraordinary amount of drink without getting drunk, but I wanted to return fairly sober, in order not to abuse the trust Ray had reposed in me. My pal stood up and recited poetry until he was tired; then he sang ribald songs. One of his pieces stuck in my memory:

*"But his wings will not rest and his feet will not stay for us:  
Morning is here in the joy of its might;  
With his breath he has sweetened a day and a night for us;  
Now let him pass, and the myrtles make way for us;  
Love can but last in us here at his height  
For a day and a night."*

After shouting and singing until he was hoarse he lay down and went to sleep. Nature had never been more beautiful than it was that afternoon. A hill on the left was crowned with woods: birds circled over the trees. A village nestled at the foot of the hill, only an old church and about twenty cottages, but so peaceful, and attractive. A stream flowed past the village, and was spanned by an

old stone bridge with five arches. The sun's rays bathed the mossy walls and gleaming waters. A few children were fishing from the bridge, laughing joyously, and shouting with delight, as I tossed them a few coins. A man of about forty was fishing lower down the stream and asked me for a cigarette. I gave him a packet of "Maryland," and, when he discovered I could understand French, he started to inveigh against his government for the nuiserly pension it had given him. Having lost an eye and a hand, he received only ten francs a week! He took out the glass eye and shook it at me, to impress upon me that it was really artificial. I felt sorry for the poor fellow, but after all he was healthy, and his needs were few. He told me he had been wounded near Vauquois in the Argonne, and he seemed to think I had the power to increase his pension for he kept repeating: "*Vous voyez bien que c'est pas assez, vous ferez quelque chose pour moi, n'est-ce pas, monsieur?*" At length I was able to get away, and left the mutilated one muttering with his eye in his hand.

We got back without incident, and learnt that we were going back into the furnace next day. No transport was provided, and we had to march the twenty odd miles, with packs and full equipment. It was a very hot day and the dust choked us. After the first few miles the men marched with their heads down and the sweat made dark patches on the jackets where the equipment rubbed. When we halted for a short rest, some of the men smoked and joked, but most of them simply lay on the grass and looked up at the sky. They were too tired to talk. It was five in the evening when we reached Albert, and were informed that we had to go in that very night. The news was received in silence, for we knew what was in store. There were a number of recruits who had not been in the line before, and the old hands rather despised them. Some of the new-comers were boys who had enlisted as soon as they were old enough. Others were men who had hung back until white feathers, or indirect pressure, had forced them into uniform. The veterans cursed at having been such bloody fools as to enlist before conscription came in, but at the same time hated the recruits who had held back.

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We had to wait a couple of hours, for orders, or guides, or for darkness to set in ; all I knew was that we had to wait, and the men guessed that it was for one of those three reasons, but no one save the C.O. and his entourage really knew.

Then we marched towards the soaring lights and bursting shells. Some of the men tried to joke, but their voices were nervous, and for the greater part of the way we marched in silence. A pale youngster near me said to his pal :

"Tom, would you walk 'ome bare-footed ? "

"I'd walk 'ome on me 'ands and knees, if they would give me my bleedin' ticket," answered his comrade.

"Struth, listen to that b——," vociferated a veteran of about twenty who had been wounded three times, "talkin' abaht 'is ticket an' 'e ain't seen any bleedin' fightin'. Wait till yer get a bayonet through yer ribs and a bullet in yer guts, then yer'll 'ave a right ter talk, not before."

As we drew nearer the trenches the shells came nearer, and my old terror came over me again. A man in front of me was hit by shell splinters and lost both feet ; they were hanging by the skin and were cut off with a knife so that the stumps could be bandaged. "Old Dick was always grumbling about his corns," remarked one of his friends, "but he won't 'ave any more now."

The trenches were shallow, and in some places the sides had been blown in. Several men were hit by bullets, through not keeping low when crossing the obstacles. Ray's brother-in-law was called Evans and led my platoon. He and I, with twelve men, were ordered to hold a hole, about fifty yards in front of the company position. It was about thirty feet wide and saucer-shaped ; the depth in the centre was about ten feet. Evans told me he had been at Eton and that it was his first experience in the line. He was full of fun and didn't seem to know what fear was. I urged him to keep low but he said he was going to win the M.C. by capturing some Germans or bombing them in their trench. He was so enthusiastic and full of beans that I knew he wouldn't last long. He had been looking through a periscope but thought it was



not clear enough. Up went his head and for a few seconds he surveyed the enemy trench. Suddenly there was a sharp crack, and he fell back with his head in pulp; the brains were exposed. A rifle grenade had caught him full in the face. At night two men dragged him back, and he was embalmed before burial. It was no doubt intended to remove the body to England after the war. Ray turned pale when he heard the news, but said nothing.

Looking through a periscope I saw hundreds of rotting corpses on the battle-field; some were flat, others had their knees up and quite a number looked as if they were praying. Inoculation must have been effective, for the smells were horrible, and we had to lie a few feet from our latrine. The drinking-water tasted of petrol and chloride of lime. We got cold tea at night, but it had such a vile taste that we took just enough to moisten our lips. After a couple of days we finished a trench, from the hole we were holding back to the main trench. While digging it we came upon a dead German. However, as he was only just uncovered when the requisite depth had been reached he was allowed to lie. He lay across the bottom of the trench, exposed from head to waist. It was discovered that if one pressed him on the belly Jerry would croak. That discovery was the source of much mirth; each man in passing pressed a foot on the German's belly, and the louder the croak the louder the laughter.

One day I picked up a little book about the war. It was by Paul Lintier who was killed in 1916. A passage gripped my attention for it expressed the thoughts of so many at the front. I read it several times and remember most of it even now. It ran approximately as follows: "Ah! if I survive this slaughter, how well I shall know how to live! I had never known that there was joy merely in breathing, opening one's eyes in the morning. . . . I thought that only certain moments in life were worth living and I disregarded the others. But if I am alive when this war is over I shall know how to make the most of each passing hour. I shall get the utmost out of every second; it will be like wonderful cool water passing through the fingers. I think I shall, from time to time, stop whatever

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I am doing, just to repeat to myself: 'I am alive! I am alive!'"

After a few uneventful days, I was ordered to proceed to a fortified ruin, and act as orderly to a general. Standing on a small knoll, it was extremely useful for observation purposes, and Jerry shelled it from dawn till dusk. It had been so strongly reinforced, with steel and concrete, that direct hits chipped pieces off it, but failed to penetrate. It was dome-shaped and the concrete was at least three feet thick. No doubt the heaviest shells would have flattened it, but when I was in it nothing bigger than a five-nine had scored a direct hit. There were a number of runners there, and one or two of them were killed daily. When the heavy shelling cut the telephone wires a runner was sent with a message. If he was knocked out, a second went, and even a third. Most of their running was through heavy barrages, and their lives were extremely short. Many of them were awarded posthumous decorations.

A big attack was to take place at 5 a.m. and the barrage started at 3.30 a.m. Every detail had been worked out, watches had been synchronized, and it was anticipated that if the wire could be properly cut the losses involved would be slight. The infantry were given three minutes to cross No Man's Land, and the success of the operations depended largely on infantry and artillery working in the closest collaboration. If the foot-sloggers were too slow, the barrage lifted, and the defenders had time to bring their machine-guns into action. If the attackers ran too fast, they reached the enemy front line before the scheduled time, and our own shells annihilated them.

I peeped through the slit and saw the hurricane of bursting shells on Jerry's wire. He was sending up coloured lights, and his artillery retaliated fiercely on our trenches. Just as darkness was giving way to the first lights of dawn, the barrage reached such a degree of intensity that it was simply a gigantic reverberation. The drum-fire was so deafening that we had to shout in passing a message. Thousands of well-directed shells tossed the wire in the air, and huge lumps of earth flew up at each hit. It was as if enormous whales were spouting all along the trench. As I

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watched, my heart sank, for the wire was so thick that it was merely tossed into the air, and, falling back, presented an obstacle as impenetrable as when untouched. The general peered through his glasses and muttered: "O God, my poor men!"

The whistles blew and I watched the doomed men swarming out of the trench. The Germans brought out their machine-guns and mowed down the running figures. Many reached the wire and threw themselves against it. But they were slaughtered before they could use their wire cutters and were left hanging on the wire like scarecrows. It was like attacking a furnace by throwing butter at it. I reflected that those lifeless bundles would in a few days make the air more pestilential, and their relatives would be informed that they died like heroes. It ought to be possible for competent local observers to call off an attack when it is obviously doomed to failure. In the attack of which I speak, four battalions, comprising over two thousand men, went over the top, and barely fifty crawled back, and most of the survivors were badly wounded. One officer cursed the useless waste of life and another replied mildly: "It's no bloody use crying over spilt milk. With a little luck the wire would have been properly cut and then we would have won a brilliant victory." I had often noticed that, in war, battles are decided by strange and apparently trivial happenings. A sudden downpour of rain, a sudden change in the direction of the wind, a prisoner's blabbing, these and many other factors may make or mar an attack.

I stayed two more days in the fort and then returned to my platoon. At night I went out with an officer and four men, to examine the enemy wire where the unsuccessful attack had taken place. The dead were so thick that we crawled over them. They were not really putrid, but many had been so horribly mutilated that we were sometimes crawling in bowels and blood. It was like crawling through a city of the dead, a city stricken by plague. The enemy were on the alert, and fired a sharp burst whenever they saw the slightest movement. We suspected that a German patrol was out, and our eyes and ears were strained to the utmost. When one carries one's life in one's hands

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one's nerves are more alert than at normal times. I once heard a German whisper to his companion when they were at least twenty yards away. At such times one is like a man walking on a wire high up in the air, and who knows that the slightest slip will mean death. I had been on many patrols and attributed my safety mainly to luck but also to care. I never stood upright if I could avoid it and always shot, bombed, or stabbed to kill, when the critical moment came.

As I crawled near the German wire I heard two or three shots, and then saw a figure run a few steps and fall full length. I wormed my way towards the figure and saw that it was a German. He ceased moving when I drew near, and I saw him lying stretched out, pretending to be dead. Very carefully and deliberately I sank my knife in his back just below the shoulders. He gave a convulsive shudder and lay still. It was impossible to pull out the knife, and when I rolled him over I saw the end of the blade sticking out of the chest. I got it out after a struggle, and wriggled over to where I thought the officer would be. He was unconscious, having been shot through the body. His pulse was still fairly strong and I dragged him back to our lines. The men had cleared off when they heard the shot. When I reached the dug-out I dropped off to sleep, without even taking off my boots.

When I woke it was breakfast-time and I sat up rubbing my eyes. Then I noticed blood on my clothes, and brains on my boots and puttees. I had the morning off, and spent it cleaning myself and sleeping, for I had volunteered for another patrol the next evening. At noon we sat in the trench drinking our dinner. I say "drinking," for dinner invariably consisted of a pint or so of hot water, in which floated two or three tiny bits of bully beef. I was in the habit of spearing the beef with my knife and then drinking the coloured water at one gulp. A gentle rain was falling and we sat round the dixie, muddy, dirty, lousy, and wet. Everyone cursed the cooks and fierce oaths rose in our throats: "I don't mind being killed but it's hell to starve to death," growled one.

"Why the hell do they expect us to fight on skilly?"

cried another. "Why, the bloody paupers get better than this muck."

"Blessed are the shirkers for they shall have good jobs," bawled another, "blessed are the profiteers for they shall have the pick of the whores; and blessed are the b——s who stay at home, for they shall eat all the grub."

In the middle of the cursing a big shell fell right in the middle of us, and made a hole at least six feet deep. I found, when I came to, that I was on the edge of the crater. It was only that morning that we had been discussing whether one would hear a shell that was going to drop on one, and there was the problem solved, for we had heard nothing before the awful burst that made the ground heave under me, and sent up a shower of limbs and huge pieces of earth. Of ten men, six were killed outright and three badly wounded, while I received nothing but a tremendous fright, sundry bruises and scratches, and a blow in the face from the boot-encased foot of one of the killed. It blacked my eyes and cut my cheek.

As I lay, imbibing the acrid fumes and listening to the groans of the wounded, I wondered for a moment if I had been killed and had awakened in hell. Pieces of bodies were lying many yards away; of one man only the head and a leg could be found, the rest had been buried. One of the wounded had been cut almost in two; his bowels were exposed and he dragged himself a few yards crying: "Mother!" and losing blood in pints. Another fellow had an arm torn off and the blood spouted out of the mangled stump.

We buried the dead at dusk, and a man near me muttered that we might as well dig our own bloody graves at the same time and save others the trouble. My nerves were badly shaken again, and I trembled as I helped to place the mangled remains in the graves. The company had lost seventeen men in two days, and I wondered how many more days I would survive. Ray offered to send me away for a rest, but I refused, as I feared that if I once got away I would not come back very willingly. Besides, there was something in the trenches that one never found elsewhere: a comradeship so deep that no words could ever describe

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it. Those of us who spent long and weary months in the front line, shall we ever forget those humble heroes who sat or crouched muddy and lousy, stamping their feet to avoid going to sleep? They cursed and grumbled, went hungry and cold, but never faltered. Sometimes at night, in nightmares, I live those moments over again. Once again I sit in a cold wet trench, hear the zip of bullets and the scream of shells; again I hear the agonizing cries of my wounded comrades. I wake in a cold sweat just as a big German runs his bayonet through my stomach. Then I lie awake, my heart full of pity and grief for those obscure comrades, whose pinched, grey, and lined faces betrayed the privations and sufferings they were undergoing.

One of them always comes back to my mind for his sublime heroism. He was mortally wounded and lived a few weeks in hospital. The most serious wounds were in the body, but the legs had also been hit. When the nurse was stripping off his clothes he said:

"Can't you send a man to do it?"

"Why?" asked the young woman.

"Because I'm covered with lice."

"That's nothing; it isn't your fault."

"Well, don't take my boots and socks off, please."

"Why not? You can't keep them on in bed."

"But I would rather you left them on, really."

"Don't be foolish. Why should you keep them on?"

"Because I was in the line a month before I got wounded and they stink."

Next night I went out on another patrol, and collected a number of pay-books and identity disks from the dead. It was a bright moonlight night, the corpses were white and ghostly. The German I had stabbed was lying where he had met his death, and I took some papers and a pocket-book. Among the papers were letters from his home. I learnt from them that the man I had killed was supporting his parents, and his wife was expecting a child. There were poems cut from magazines, most of them were of a religious nature, and had been marked with pencil.

We went out for a rest after a particularly unpleasant time. Autumn was coming on, and we saw that the great

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offensive was not going to end matters, and that we were in for another winter of it. Our billets were in a ruined village, and the shell-swept trees were shedding the few leaves that remained. I found an old park and walked round it each evening. The oaks still kept their leaves but the other trees were almost bare. The rain dripped down, making the picture melancholy in the extreme.

Danesford spent most of his time gambling; he had a veritable craze for it. When he was broke he came for a loan, and usually paid it back, although I never worried when he didn't, as money had ceased to have much importance for me; all I valued was my life. One Sunday we secured permission to go to Amiens for two days. The officers wanted their stores replenished and Captain Ray went with us, probably to see his wife. As soon as we arrived there I rushed to Julie, and found her serving a customer, so I walked down the street until the coast was clear. She welcomed me with open arms, and we drank a glass of wine in the back shop, while I related what had happened since we parted. She had heard that the British had won a great victory on the Somme, and I was tempted to reply that another such victory would be the end of us. I left her at noon, after arranging to meet her after dark. My pal had been with some whore he had picked up in the street, but he said she did not smell wholesome and he got up and left her. We discussed our plans for after the war, and both thought that it would be impossible to settle down to a humdrum civilian occupation. I said I didn't care how poor I was if I had a cottage and a piece of ground. Danesford scoffed at the idea of being happy while poor.

We had been drinking, that was why we were optimistic enough to presume that we would see the end of the war. When sober we did not usually dare to be so sanguine. My friend went on the spree in the afternoon, and I wandered about the town. I avoided the centre of it, which was full of officers; strolling down the main street meant a perpetual salute. I went into at least twenty cafés, and drank a glass of wine in each. Most of them were being run by the wife, during her husband's absence at the front; but occasionally one came upon a bellicose pub-keeper over

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military age. The further one went from the front the greater was the hatred.

I dined with Julie at a little inn just outside the town. It was a warm evening in spite of the falling leaves, and we sat outside, at a little table, surrounded by shrubs in big pots. The road was quiet, and only the distant thunder of guns reminded us of the war. We had some good wine and laughed and joked, determined to enjoy the time together, no matter what the future might hold in store for us. At times, when she asked me if I loved her, I said I did, and at the same time thought of Jean, with whom I still corresponded. In normal times I would never have dreamt of deceiving the girl to whom I was engaged, but I felt I was sentenced to death, and had made up my mind to enjoy wine and women whenever they came my way. Julie was alone and hungry for love; I longed for the sight and touch of female beauty after the horrors of trench life. After dinner we wandered along a quiet road lined with trees, and stood kissing at a gate. It was nearly midnight when we returned to the shop and went up to Julie's room.

The two days passed like a dream, and three days after my return we went up the line again. The ground was very muddy, and we slipped over posts, and tumbled over wire. We had been told that our stay in the front line would be of four days' duration, and when the four days passed and no relief came, we began to wonder what was in store. On the morning of the fifth day we stood to in the rain after a sleepless night, for the bombardment had been extremely heavy. I had been reading a paper from home with highly-coloured accounts of our alleged behaviour before going over the top. We, according to that journalist, laughed and joked and had to be held in check. I showed it to the men, and one said: "That was written by some swine after a good feed with a whisky and soda at his elbow. The b—— ought to be 'ere shiverin' in the cold with an empty belly an' the rain runnin' dahn 'is bleedin' neck, 'e wouldn't talk like that." The papers spoke of soldiers, heroic, dashing, contemptuous of death; we were all



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modelled on d'Artagnan. But the tragic fact was that we were civilians in uniform, of whom not ten per cent. had enlisted from patriotic motives. In considering the men round me I saw that most were in no way heroic. They longed for their homes and cursed the war with startling vigour. They cursed all who gave them orders, including the brass hats, who came at rare intervals, and found fault with everything. They were labourers, clerks, mechanics, and humble artisans, who realized that the enemy belonged to the same social classes as themselves, the vast majority of them anyway, and that they were all dupes of those who remained far in the rear, and ordered attacks in order to fill up a communiqué.

The dead in front of our parapet stank like blazes, for it was too risky a job to bury them, and when the breeze blew in our direction it made many a man vomit. After some delay we were told to stand down, and were given the rum which had been delayed. It burnt my throat but put some warmth into me. As we crowded into the dug-out, a little Cockney asked me if I came from the smoke, meaning London, and, when I said I did, he reeled off a string of pubs. I had never been in a pub before enlistment, and rarely remembered the name of any such place that I had visited since. Then he enthused about some lounge in the West End and the girls he had seduced there.

Next morning we were just tumbling out for stand-to, when a great cry went up that Jerry was coming. It was a surprise attack without artillery preparation, and we saw a number of men with big containers on their backs and nozzles in their hands. We held our fire until they were half-way across No Man's Land, and then poured such a deadly hail into them that they went down in heaps. A few stumbled on, and we saw sheets of flame bursting from their nozzles. It was the famous liquid fire of which we had heard so much. Not one reached our trench, and the flame-carriers lay enveloped in fire.

That evening we lay playing cards and wondering when we would be relieved, when I was summoned to a conference and heard that we were to attack at dawn. Four of us

played solo whist all night, and were still at it when a message was passed round to get ready. When the signal was given, we clambered over and ran like mad, hoping to take Jerry by surprise. We had covered about fifty yards in the uncertain light, when a sheet of flame flashed from the German trench, and we were raked fore and aft. Some pitched forward on their faces, others sank to their knees and collapsed. The coloured flares brought the usual barrage, but it fell behind us. I felt a stinging sensation in my left foot and fell. Crawling into a hole I examined the wound and saw that it was not serious.

For a moment I was tempted to go on, and had struggled to my feet, when I was sent spinning sideways, and felt blood running down my side. A bullet had grazed my ribs like a red-hot poker. I pulled out my dressing and dabbed iodine on it, then tried to bandage it up. Neither of the wounds was enough to put me out of action but my nerve had gone, and I crawled into a hole and lay still. A light mist hung over the ground, and away in the east a faint glow suffused the sky. For hours I lay in the midst of an inferno, with my head pushed into a little hole that gave as much protection as a newspaper. I could only surmise that the attack had failed, for no troops had gone forward after the first rush, and bullets swept overhead unceasingly. I could hear the wounded groaning, and one man crawled to die in the hole where I crouched. Both his thighs were broken and his shattered jaw hung awry. I gave him a couple of morphia tablets and he thanked me by pressing my hand. His water-bottle had been smashed, and when I took hold of mine to give him a drink I found that it was empty; some rascal had taken mine and put a leaking one in its place.

Planes flew overhead dropping steel darts, and the smoke of bursting shells hung over the battle-field. I suffered from thirst, but was afraid to crawl out, as no one could have lived above the ground in that bullet-swept space. On my left were the remains of a village; heaps of rubble, broken boards and sticks, a few pieces of walls two or three feet high. East of it was a German cemetery with a monument of marble or granite. Jerry had built a concrete observation

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post inside a house, which had collapsed under a succession of direct hits, leaving part of the roof hanging like a cover on the post within. Away behind the Germans, stood up shattered trees. I often compared them to the nails in the board that a fakir sometimes lies on. The sight of so many shattered trees hurt me as much as lying on a nail bed would have done.

Although my two wounds were slight I suffered much from loss of blood. My boot was full of blood and my shirt stuck to my side. The pad and bandages were soaked, and the dead man's dressing was missing. I took off his shirt and scraped off the lice before tearing it in strips and tying it on my wounds. The afternoon sun was refreshing and I slept until dark, my feverish brow fanned by a pleasant breeze.

When I woke, stiff, tired, and faint from hunger and thirst, the lights were going up, and I hoped to crawl back to the British lines. But I was in a dire predicament. I had lost my rifle and had thrown away my other weapons, so that the Germans might be merciful if I fell into their hands. The dew was heavy and chilled me to the bones. Just as visibility was improving in the morning, at about four o'clock, the Germans attacked again, and came charging in droves over the disputed ground. In spite of a veritable hail of bullets they got into the English front line, but were dislodged by a desperate counter-attack, leaving many prisoners behind. I learnt the last fact in hospital, for in my hole I had only a very hazy idea of what happened after the Germans swept over me.

Once again the sun rose, tinting the light clouds with the most delicate pink and gold tracery. It suffused the sky like the blush on the face of a beautiful woman. Far above the inferno a lark sang, oblivious of man's insanity. I tried to take off my boots but the foot had swollen, and I had to cut slits in the sides. When I moved my toes the blood started to flow anew and oozed out of the cuts. I had eaten the dead man's iron rations and my own, but in each case they consisted of nothing but a few small biscuits, the bully beef having disappeared. My face and hands were encrusted with dry mud; I trembled from

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weakness and wondered if I were going to die. My wounds worried me, for they were dirty, and I was afraid of blood-poisoning or tetanus. I found a cigarette in my pocket, but was afraid to smoke it, in case it drew a shower of bombs.

At about three in the afternoon a badly wounded Jerry crawled into the hole, and was startled when he saw a live Englishman there. He had a murderous-looking knife in his hand, but he threw it away when I asked him, in German, if he intended killing a wounded man. In any case I could have got the better of him, for he had lost his left leg and was dragging a bloody stump. He had also been hit in the body and his torn tunic was covered with blood. I examined his body and saw he had not many more hours in this world. There was a big shrapnel wound in the middle of the chest and part of the entrails were visible where a piece of steel had torn the stomach. He asked me if he was going to die, and I tried to comfort him by saying that he might pull through.

I questioned him and found that he was nineteen and had been a student at Bonn when the war broke out; he enlisted on his eighteenth birthday and the Somme was his first experience of battle. He was a delicate-looking youth and told me he was studying art. I liked his face, which was handsome and frank. I had four tablets of morphia left and gave him two. He died with his head on my knees, his hands in mine. I looked at his fair features, composed in death, and imagined him, rucksack on back and staff in hand, wandering through the peaceful lanes of old Germany, singing, sketching, and after a long tramp over dusty roads and verdant meadows, resting for a drink of beer at an old rustic inn. My heart was full of a great bitterness when I reflected that he was one of the Boches, the blond beasts who were out to destroy civilization, massacre little children, and violate women . . . according to the politicians and journalists. I am not trying to pretend that the Germans were all angels, far from it. But in the aggregate they were guilty of no more crimes than the French or British. I shall never forget a regular sergeant who always said: "We would have done just what they did, if we had had the chance."

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Darkness came on again, and I thought I was surely doomed, for I was too weak to stand and racked with pain. I lay wondering if it would not be better to stand up and let a bullet put me out of my misery.

I felt that if I stayed in the hole much longer I would die of exhaustion. I had chewed the cigarette to appease my thirst, but it had the contrary effect. In the middle of the night I crawled out of the hole and dragged myself along the ground. It was about a yard a minute. The first dead man I came to had his water-bottle and iron rations intact. The cold water gave me new life. It had a vile taste but I drank it as if it had been nectar. The hard dry biscuits were sweeter than ambrosia. When I approached the English trench I shouted in a weak voice that I was English and they allowed me to crawl in.

My company had gone and no one knew anything about it. I tried to walk, but the pain in my foot was excruciating, and I was as weak as a kitten. A stretcher was brought, and I was carried to the dressing-station, where I sat among a crowd of wounded awaiting my turn. Many of them had been lying out for two or three days, and were in a bad way. Two doctors worked feverishly, stripping off bloody rags, injecting, cleansing, and patching men up so that they would stand a better chance of reaching hospital alive. The impression I had of that hole was bloody limbs and rags, the smell of chloroform, and the groans of the dying, that resound in my ears to this day. One man had been wounded all over the body by shell splinters, and refused to die until we were in the ambulance, on the way to the C.C.S. Suddenly he gave a loud cry and expired.



## CHAPTER XVIII

TWO days later I found myself in a large hospital under canvas near the sea. There were about a hundred men in my ward and many were doomed. Every night a screen was put round one or two beds, and a stretcher on rubber-tyred wheels was brought in, to take out a corpse to swell the ranks of those lying in the cemetery just outside.

Nearly all the graves looked new and there were thousands of them. Sometimes at night I looked at the graves from the window, when the moon made them look ghostly. I found it hard to realize that under every cross were the remains of a young man, who, in August, 1914, was full of health and vigour. I thought of them training, drilling hard, and walking in the quiet fields after the day's work. Then sailing for France and going into the trenches in mud and rain, sunshine and dust, until one day they were carried out broken and bloody to die in a foreign land.

In the bed next to me on the right, was a man who had been badly gassed. His face was grey with heavy black rings under the eyes. He coughed without respite; whitish bubbles and froth formed on his lips, and from time to time a nurse came and wiped his face. Occasionally he vomited with such violent retching that his body was shaken. Little blood-trickles ran down from his mouth, and it was evident that he would soon be pushing up the daisies. When he spoke I detected a Yorkshire accent. He asked the nurse to take good care of his little possessions hanging in a bag at the bedside. He informed her that he had been robbed last time he was in hospital. His voice was very hoarse but cheerful, and he spoke to me of his wife and children. His chief concern was whether he would secure his discharge from the army and get his job back before the rush that would take place when millions of men were demobilized.

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I tried to hide my forebodings and listened patiently to his plans. He was interrupted by a particularly violent fit of coughing, and his face was already that of a dead man; his voice became almost inaudible and his fingers clutched at the sheet.

The nurse brought a padre who, sheltered by a screen, recited the prayers for the dying: "O Almighty God, with whom do live the spirits of just men made perfect, after they are delivered from their earthly prison; we humbly commend the soul of this thy servant, our dear brother, into thy hands . . . most humbly beseeching thee, that it may be precious in thy sight. . . . And teach us who survive, in this and other like daily spectacles of mortality, to see how frail and uncertain our own condition is; and so to number our days, that we may seriously apply our hearts to that holy and heavenly wisdom whilst we live here, which may in the end bring us to life everlasting, through the merits of Jesus Christ thine only Son our Lord."

It was a solemn occasion and I listened reverently, wondering how long it would be before some parson would be reading the same prayer over me. Sometimes we discussed the best death, and it was generally agreed that a bullet through head or heart was better than wounds that allowed one to live for weeks or months in hospital, before passing out. One man said that when his turn came he would like to be blown to atoms, so that his pals would not have to trouble about digging a grave. Next morning we played banker, told smutty yarns and laughed at any feeble joke. It was because, in the midst of so much carnage, we felt we were safe, at any rate for the time being.

Next night the padre came to another gas case who croaked that he wasn't dying, then wept bitterly. Half an hour later the body snatchers came and took him away on a stretcher covered with a Union Jack.

The man on my left was in the Rifle Brigade, and had been wounded in the right arm near the shoulder, by an explosive bullet. I had often heard rumours of the Germans using such things but had never seen one. Sometimes a bullet shattered a bone and needless to say caused an extremely ugly wound. I fancy that had happened to this

man, but he told all and sundry that it was an explosive bullet, because it had made such a mess of his arm. He had undergone fourteen operations and was very weak. He was propped up by pillows, and got practically no sleep, for the pain gave him no respite. Tubes carried off the pus, and the poor fellow swore that the doctors were simply experimenting with the arm. It was certain that the muscles and nerves had suffered extensive injury, so the arm, even if saved, would never have been much good.

The doctor was a self-satisfied old fool with a head like that of a rooster, big round fat cheeks, very small eyes drowned in fat, and a perpetual smirk. He floated in a bath of conceit, and when he came round the ward his smug complacency was most irritating to those he tended. He had no sense of humour, no common sense and little skill. It was even alleged that when a soldier annoyed him he would cut on a far more generous scale than the nature of the wounds warranted. I had no actual proof of that, but the swine was quite capable of it. A lad whose hand had almost healed told me that the doctor had wanted to amputate when he first examined the hand, and was extremely angry when the lad opposed him. A private was never allowed to contradict an officer. The village saw-bones, suddenly put into khaki with stars on his shoulders, and a Sam Browne, treated the men like cattle. He thought all the nurses were in love with him and strutted like a puppy with two tails.

One day as he passed near us my left-hand neighbour shouted out: "Why the hell don't you take this arm off, you bloody swine? Can't you see it's killing me? I get no sleep day or night and am suffering the torments of the damned. I know you are experimenting on it, and don't care a b—— if I go west or not," and he continued to curse the M.O., who looked as if he were going to have an apoplectic fit.

It appeared that some patients had overheard the stupid doctor telling the Sister that he was experimenting with the arm, which would never be any good. Next day it was amputated and my neighbour was a happier man. That shattered limb with its tubes and perpetual dressings had



been holding him back. He was supposed to be under arrest but we regarded that as a joke. The M.O. would never dare go on with the case, for we would all give evidence against him. It was quite possible that he would get the patient punished indirectly, for military discipline had to be maintained, even when authority was vested in a nin-compoop utterly devoid of gumption. His favourite remark while he rubbed his hands and smirked was, "We can always bury our mistakes," followed by a loud heehaw. It is appalling that such fools should be let loose with the power of life and death.

Now that he had lost his arm my neighbour grew brighter every day and was in high feather, realizing that he would soon be discharged with some sort of a pension. He had a fund of stories and every afternoon a crowd of walking cases hung round his bed.

There had been a pretty nurse in the ward and one day she disappeared. An ugly colleague, named Mary, told me that Daisy, the pretty girl, had been sent home in disgrace as she was pregnant. All the men in the ward had been told the news in strict confidence. It was the ugly frump's revenge. There was a hospital for officers near ours, and every night they were to be seen climbing the hill with pretty nurses and W.A.A.C.s. All restraint was broken down; a spirit of licence was abroad.

After a couple of weeks I was able to get about quite well with crutches, and spent most of my time on the beach. I sat watching the waves, like a marooned sailor, and wondering if I would ever see England again. One day I was making paper boats for a small boy, when a familiar voice hailed me, and I espied a corporal who left us at Ypres.

"How the hell are you, Saint-Mandé?"

"Can't grumble. Got down the line with two cushy ones. What are you doing here?" I replied.

"I've got a bloody fine job here, and am not going up the line again."

He was about thirty and before the war had kept a shop in Reading. The call for men coming when bankruptcy was staring him in the face, he enlisted, and his wife went as a V.A.D. nurse. He was short, thick-set, ugly and blasé.

Before the war most of his week-ends had been spent in bed with London prostitutes. The recital of those pleasant times had often thrilled an eager audience in some foul dug-out. Up in Ypres, the corporal was the hero of a curious happening. He was wounded during an attack on the Bluff. One night, when rain was falling in torrents, he was sent back with a message, and got lost somewhere near Dickebusch. Blundering on in the darkness and rain he came to a cottage. The windows were boarded up, but a light shone through the cracks. He knocked at the door, but no answer came, in spite of whisperings that continued inside. Angry at getting no reply, and impatient to know where he was, he climbed on to the window-ledge to peep over the boards. Just as he stuck his face over the boards, he saw a woman under the table, and she screamed. The husband fired off a blunderbuss and the corporal fell bleeding from a number of wounds. He wandered about until he came to some troops and they sent him to hospital. He lost an eye, and his face remained pock-marked as a result of pellet wounds. It appeared that the wretched peasants were expecting the Germans to break through, and having heard revolting stories of alleged atrocities, had resolved to sell their lives dearly.

It was curious that he should have been wounded by a civilian, for up at Neufsteert he had been responsible for the arrest and death of two spies. Jerry seemed to know the precise moment when British troops were on the cross-roads, and invariably sent over some coal-boxes that killed some soldiers and stampeded the remainder. The corporal did some investigating and solved the mystery. There were still a few civilians in the village and one of them was frequently in the vicinity of a tall ruined house near the cross-roads. Whenever troops were passing he held up a white rag. The signal was spotted by the man's wife in a cottage visible from the German lines. She hurried and started hanging clothes on the line. When evidence was complete the A.P.M. was informed and the couple were arrested. In their cottage was a special lamp for signalling at night, a code-book and a large sum of money. The wretched couple were shot in a field behind the church.

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They had succumbed to the lure of gold just like the profiteers at home.

There were many rumours of spies in different parts of the front, most of them were merely rumours.

When my foot healed I was given sundry odd jobs in the ward, and became quite expert at making beds, sweeping, dressing wounds, and washing patients. Some of them grew feverish at night and wanted cold drinks. It relieved them considerably when the pillows were shaken up. One man had lost a leg, and the other one had to come off. He had just heard the news when I passed his bed one evening, and he called me to speak to him.

"What d'yer think of it? They are going to take off the only leg I've got."

"Hard luck, Jim, but there are plenty of poor devils lying out there under the wooden crosses who would like to change places with you."

"What the 'ell am I going to do when I get my ticket? I was a navvy before I enlisted."

"They won't let you starve. You'll have a pension and will probably live in a great mansion where you will be taught a trade."

"I want no bloody mansion. I want my old pals in the 'Rose and Crown' where we used to drink a couple of pints after the day's work."

I chatted with him for awhile, and tears ran down his cheeks when he realized that never again would he tramp the highways, moving from job to job, sleeping out in the summer, and only going to workhouses (he called them "spikes") in winter. He had been a tramp really, only working when need of tobacco or beer forced him to do so.

Another man had been badly wounded in the head and chest. The nurse had told me there was no hope for him, but he refused to die for many days after he should have done so according to the doctor's dictum. This man, Warner by name, had been a gamekeeper, and often spoke to me of the birds and beasts; he knew their haunts and characteristics; the woods were an open book to him. His hands were hot and perspiration stood on his brow.

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"I'm not going to die, am I?" he asked me as I arranged his pillow.

"Of course not. Only the good die young. You're much too wicked to go for many years yet."

"I'm not afraid, you understand. It isn't for myself, but in the cottage on the edge of the moor my wife and four children are waiting for me. Surely God will answer their prayers and spare me. I've never wronged any man."

"Cheer up, Dick, you will soon be well, but you mustn't worry; just lie still and make up your mind you are going to get well."

He held my hands and I wiped his fevered brow. Suddenly he sat up and in a strong voice said: "I see them," and his poor torn body gave up the ghost.

Another man had only one eye, and his body had been terribly mangled. The doctors had taken forty pieces of steel out of him. A shell had burst near him and he had been brought down the line to die. He knew he could not live, and indeed had no desire to, for the agony he suffered was too awful to bear for long. One day I went behind the screen to hand him a pot and he begged me to pray to God to shorten his sufferings. I knelt at his bedside and prayed as he wished me to, although I had no faith of any kind at that time. Tears ran from his eye, and the scar where the other one had been twitched horribly. He also spoke to me of his wife and children. Then he said:

"You've read books. Tell me, do you believe in a heaven?"

"Of course I do."

"Will I meet my wife and children there?"

"Surely."

"Will you read me something out of the Bible? I need comfort, and until I was hit I read a chapter nearly every night."

"What chapter shall I read?"

"The fourteenth chapter of John."

I procured a Bible and read the beautiful words: "Let not your heart be troubled: ye believe in God, believe also in me. In my Father's house are many mansions: if it were not so, I would have told you. I go to prepare a

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place for you. . . . Peace I leave with you, my peace I give unto you : not as the world giveth, give I unto you. Let not your heart be troubled, neither let it be afraid."

When I had finished reading, I looked at the mutilated face, and saw an expression of ineffable peace. His wounds would trouble him no more :

" A death like sleep,  
A gentle wafting to immortal life."

Next day I was given the job of wheeling patients to the operating theatre. Some were afraid, but most of them had no qualms. One quiet fellow, who had never been known to swear in the ward, made amends under the anæsthetic, and cursed with the skill of the real virtuoso.

The first operation I saw was on a man who had been hit in the head. A piece of shrapnel was embedded in the skull and pressing on the brain. With a brace and bit a surgeon drilled a hole in the skull, just like a carpenter drilling wood. A long thin steel instrument was inserted in the cavity, and the splinter raised. The operation was quite successful, but the patient died of heart failure, having been weakened by loss of blood while lying wounded before the bearers found him.

The second case was an amputation of the right leg at the thigh. I was thrilled to see them sawing the bone like in a butcher's shop. I had expected to see a rush of blood but saw only little globules that were wiped with a sponge. That man also died, for he had lain unattended for four days, and was too weak to stand the operation, but it was the only chance of saving his life. When the bag over his face stopped going up and down the surgeon said : " I was expecting that," and calmly went to wash his hands.

A young Cockney came to the ward with a slight wound and kept the men amused until he disappeared a week later. He had no sense of decency and bawled indecent songs at any hour, even at night ; that was the reason for his removal. He chummed up with a man at the other end of the ward and shouted to him conundrums of an obscene nature. At other times he stood up in his bed and gave a good imitation of a charlatan ; no doubt he had often

watched them in Petticoat Lane and elsewhere. Holding aloft a box of pills he harangued us more or less as follows :

"Who am I? I am Orlando Giuseppe Cesarotti Cascara Sagrada, the man who has tamed lions, wrestled with tigers, and torn open sharks, to wrest from them the secrets of their entrails to cure suffering humanity. I know all, I see all, I cure all. My science is the science of life and death. I explore the infinite and find there cures for all the ills of humanity. This little box is cheap at five pounds, what am I talking about? Many a millionaire would give half his fortune for it, and think himself lucky to get it. The pills in this little box will cure everything from pimples to palsy, corns to cancer. It has cured thousands of coughs, colds, and sore holes. I'm not 'ere to-day an' gone to-morrow, I'm going this bloody minute," for he had seen some guardians of law and order approaching; before they reached his bed 'Erb was lying between the sheets, apparently asleep.

The hospital was about a mile from the town, and I spent a good deal of time in the shop of an old bookseller. The books were dusty, and I doubt if he ever sold any, but he was a *petit rentier* and did not mind how slack trade was, provided he could chat with kindred spirits. The old man was at least seventy, with white hair and a gentle expression. He had been tall, but age had doubled him up and he needed a stick. Priests were his pet aversion, and he often kept me for hours while relating their misdeeds.

One day he found me reading an old copy of Montaigne's "Journey to Italy" and laughed loudly, for the passage that had arrested my attention ran somewhat as follows : "All prostitutes and immodest girls are excluded from the baths and must not come within five hundred paces of them. Those who break the rule will be whipped at the four corners of the baths . . . likewise all persons are forbidden to use lascivious or immodest language to women and girls or to touch their persons indecorously . . ."

Old Loubet told me that he had loved many women but had never married. He professed to be an expert in female psychology, and his opinion of the fair sex was extremely uncomplimentary. He also said women were like cats,

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alternately purring and showing their claws. He showed me a picture of a *ceinture de chasteté*, and said it was the only way to guarantee female fidelity in the husband's absence. Many of the anecdotes he told me about women and their frailty seemed rather fantastic, but I have since found them in Lecky's "History of European Morals," which was probably where the bookseller read them also.

I spent much time with the old sailors on the beach and when my wounds healed swam in the bay. Such a life was too happy to continue, and one morning I was given orders to report to the base depot. That camp was the most depressing place I've ever struck. Most of the men there had been wounded more than once, and were malingering, in order to avoid being sent back to the hell they loathed. They had gone out full of determination, but their nerves had been shattered, and they went about listless and dejected, like prisoners who have appealed against sentence of death and await the result.

It took exactly two days to sicken me, and I asked the doctor to mark me fit and send me up the line. In the trenches I always swore that wild horses would not drag me back if I once got away. If I could have got clean away from the war, I do not think I would have been anxious to get back. But the base camp was one horror after another. Cleaning buttons, saluting, kit inspections, lectures by nonentities, who appeared to think that any flapdoodle was good enough for the troops. We wandered about like convicts when not on parade, and I soon realized that the trenches, with all their dangers and discomforts, offered action and the opportunity of forgetting; that was what my sick soul desired most at the moment. The N.C.O.s were a rotten lot who had never been up the line, and hoped to keep their jobs by giving the men hell.

I inquired for a sergeant named Black Jack, who had been a terror when I last visited the camp. He had arrested me for having a knife stuck in my puttee, and I did not get my own back until the night I left, when I waited for him near the canteen, and gave him such a thumping that at the end of it he lay on the ground and refused to get up. When I asked what had happened to him, the men in the

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tent smiled and one of them told me the story. Several wounded men, straight from hospital, were exasperated by his bullying tactics, and decided to revenge themselves. In the middle of the night they went to his tent, and overpowered him before he could offer any resistance. As soon as he was gagged and bound they gave him the finest bastinado any man could have. They then painted his abdomen red, his posterior blue and shaved his head. A stake was planted in the middle of the parade ground, and the unhappy bully tied to it, with a notice on his chest warning all bullying N.C.O.s that they would suffer the same fate if they did not cease badgering the men. Strenuous efforts were made to discover the culprits but in vain. The camp commandant even offered seven days' leave to anyone who would denounce them. It was near that camp that a military policeman was murdered by colonial troops; my only regret on hearing the news was that they didn't continue killing them.

I received instructions to report at the Australian camp, and accompany their draft up the line, as my battalion was near their division and I could act as guide. Those "Aussies" were a fine lot of men, very different from the "Imperials," as they termed the troops from the British Isles. They were huge fellows and looked like farmers, lumbermen and hunters. There was a jovial "hail-fellow-well-met" air about them; they were a care-free, jocular, independent crowd who feared neither God nor man. Their N.C.O.s had to be the biggest men, otherwise they would often have been disobeyed. I saw a corporal give a man an order, the man told him to go to hell, was immediately knocked down, and then obeyed. I do not wish to relate that incident as typical, but it illustrates the rough-and-ready methods they employed when necessary.

Like all the other colonial troops I had met, they hated saluting and cleaning buttons. In that they did not differ from the home product, but they went further and often refused to do such things. At the base they often sat outside a café, laughing at the English Tommy saluting every wart on the army's backside that happened to pass. On one occasion when I visited their camp to play poker, I



heard one of their officers speaking to them severely on parade for not saluting. They answered by making rude noises with their mouths. Those soldiers might with advantage have had a little more discipline, but I certainly admired their refusal to be dragooned or to put up with the pettifogging treatment that English troops endured so often.

As we marched to the station, eight kilometres distant, the men from the land of the kangaroo showed their independence by sitting at the roadside whenever they felt inclined. After a rest one of them would shout out: "Ready, diggers?" and off they went again. Their officer appeared accustomed to the procedure, for he patiently waited until they started. Near the docks they espied some English military police with the usual red band round the cap. With a howl of rage, the leading Aussies broke ranks and raced after them, calling to those in the rear: "Come on, lads, let's throw the bloody robin redbreasts in the dock." The police ran like hares and escaped, for they carried no impedimenta. Some of the Australians told me they killed a red-cap because he tried to arrest a man whose coat was unbuttoned.

Some of the police may have been sensible, but the majority were prize rotters. On two occasions when I was arrested for trifling offences I was released on payment of a bribe. Most of them had never seen the trenches, and seemed to be anxious to secure promotion by securing as many convictions as possible. Such jobs should be reserved for men who have been wounded and who would be more tactful in dealing with fighting men. All soldiers know that discipline must be maintained, but they resent the dictatorial and overbearing tone of those Dogberries, who were provocative in the extreme. Many red-caps pushed and jostled soldiers to such a pitch, that no self-respecting man could stand it without retaliating. Not a few of the police were nothing but *agents-provocateurs*.

Winter was making itself felt; there was a nip in the air. In spite of that, the sun had been shining all day, and the evening was calm. A slight mist hung over the town, the setting sun clothed the bay in splendour, and in the twilight I watched children playing in the streets.

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Women stood in doorways and girls hurried home from their work. The door of one house stood open and I looked longingly at the fire; it reminded me of home, and a great sadness came over me. I visualized my return to the trenches and cursed myself for going back. The sights and smells of the front line came back to me, and I wondered how my nerves would behave.

We boarded the train at seven in the evening, and took forty-eight hours to cover about a hundred kilometres. We climbed with our kit into the horse-boxes, and soon each vehicle was packed with singing, swearing, boisterous, dare-devil sons of the great southern continent. While awaiting the departure, my companions set out to explore, and discovered that the covered trucks on an adjoining set of rails contained whisky, provisions, and cigarettes. Sentries were posted, and a number of cases transferred to our trucks. After a wait that seemed interminable the train grunted, sneezed, shook, exploded, and moved off at a snail's pace.

The sounds that issued from the trucks defy all description. It was as if we were transporting a circus, a monster jazz orchestra, and a thousand town criers. Just after dawn we came abreast of an enormous store of red apples at a siding. A number of acrobats climbed along to the engine, and, under threat of sudden death, the driver brought his clattering machine to a standstill. The stopping did not require much effort on the driver's part, as the ancient contraption had been trying to cease belching for some time. Ground-sheets and blankets predominated in the apple-carrying department; and soon we stood ankle deep in the fragrant fruit. The engine was stopped frequently by thirsty soldiers who desired water for tea. Then the driver and his aide-de-camp would scour the neighbourhood with buckets, to replenish their supply.

In the middle of the night we had a real breakdown and were motionless for four hours. In nearly every truck was a roaring bonfire, fed with wood from the sides and bottom of the vehicle. Bayonets and entrenching tools were being used to wrench the wood off the trucks. Wild carousals were in full swing. Those bacchanalian revels were truly awe-inspiring. There was no timid singing, half-hearted

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drinking, or any thought of the morrow. I was struck on the head by an empty bottle that was hurled from a truck, and the blow must have been severe, for I was unconscious until someone who saw the incident poured cold water over me. They took me into the truck whence the bottle had come, and the culprit apologized profusely. I came away with two bottles of whisky as the owners were too drunk to take care of them.

In due course we reached a siding and had breakfast. The order had been to set out at once, but the Aussies swore they would not move without food, and so we had a meal of hot tea, bread and bacon. What would have been the good of men marching many miles on an empty stomach, and arriving in the trenches exhausted?

As we marched towards the line the landscape became desolate, and the ruined villages forsaken. The ground was pock-marked with shell craters, and the trees were merely mangled stumps. It was a devastated region. We passed the ruins of a large farm. Half of the roof had been carried away by shells, and the rafters were like ghosts keeping watch over the debris that lay round the dung-heap, overgrown with weeds. A gaunt and mangy cat skulked in the blackened kitchen, and corn grew in the yard. We were resting at the side of the road, and I explored the barns and homestead. Rank weeds grew everywhere, the wells was full of filth, rats had gnawed some sacks of bran, and a stinking pool had formed in what had been the sitting-room. No words could ever describe the sadness of the place. I spent the night in the Australian billets and found my battalion next morning in a ruined village near Albert.

## CHAPTER XIX

**H**ARDLY any of the old faces remained. It was almost as if I had gone to a new unit. Captain Ray had been killed by a shell in the front line. They collected his remains in a sand-bag. I regretted his death very much for he had proved himself a magnificent leader, competent and tactful; he inspired his men in the way only true leaders can, without oaths or excessive punishment. He made his officers do their duty and some of them disliked him. They would have preferred serving under some old fool, who would have allowed the junior officers to slack, while the N.C.O.s bullied the men.

The new captain was not popular with the men, but I made up my mind to wait and see before passing judgment. Sometimes an officer was extremely unpopular yet most competent. It may have been due to an attitude of aloofness. I detested the officer who sacrificed discipline for cheap popularity. Danesford had been killed by a bomb that shattered his head. All my old pals had been either killed or wounded.

The billets were wet and cold. We slept on damp straw, and, when it rained, our blankets were sodden. After drills we played cards round a candle, and were not sorry when the order came to go up the line again. We marched in silence past Albert and the ground the British had won at the cost of so many lives. The old German front line was passed; some heavy artillery occupied the dug-outs, and had built their guns in pits near them. Someone said they were eight-inch, and each time they fired I thought my ear-drums would burst. The road was ankle deep in mud, and lined with corpses, some on stretchers, others lying half buried in the sea of mud. That sight was most depressing, reminding one too much of death.

Artillery limbers and wagons, lorries and transport of all kinds, pushed us off the road, and covered us with thick mud. Occasionally a shell burst near us with a frightful roar, and we threw ourselves flat in the mud, until we were plastered with slime all over. The trenches were flooded and the boards floated. We spent most of our time carrying water from the dug-outs. In the evening ten of us squeezed into a hole that might have held four comfortably, and kept fairly dry by standing on empty petrol tins. The air was foul, and the roof would not have kept out the smallest shell ever fired. The walls sweated and covered us with slime when we leant against them. One man sang in dismal tones: "When you come to the end of a perfect day," until a companion told him to shut his gap or get to hell out of it. There was silence for awhile then the songster burst out with:

"Go it, muvver Brahn,  
Go it, muvver Brahn,  
If I catch yer bending  
I'll 'ave yer trousers dahn."

I was suffering severely from toothache, and, at last, in desperation, asked one of the men to pull it out. He tied a piece of string to the tooth and tugged as hard as he could. The string broke and I yelled with pain. After various unsuccessful attempts someone found a pair of pliers, and wrenched the aching tooth out, lacerating the gum in the process. There was a little thin chap in the section. He hailed from Swindon and had worked on the railway. He was always grumbling, and worried too much to put on any fat. A big fat butcher from Cardiff was his pet aversion, and the two quarrelled like cat and dog. Someone had read in a paper from home that we would not put down our arms until the enemy was on his knees and gasping. That amused him tremendously, and he repeated it *ad nauseam*. Another man picked up a paper which announced that everything pointed to speedy victory; and when we were lying in the stinking cesspools that did duty as trenches he would whisper: "Never mind, my bonny lads, everything points!"

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One night we were out digging and got soaked to the skin. The dead were so numerous that we struck bodies with our spades, and sometimes had to cut them in two. One man had a rather sardonic sense of humour, and said he would find a funny bone and have a joke with that. The smell was vile, and when the new trench was completed enormous quantities of lime had to be scattered to keep down the smell. It was not unusual to kick up the guts of a dead man while walking along the trench; when that happened some earth was thrown over the putrid remains, and the little mounds thus formed became quite numerous.

The food was generally cold and insufficient, for Jerry shelled the back areas heavily, and the cooks had the wind up. The carriers had a thankless job, for they were cursed by the hungry men, who were like wolves when the supper was six hours late. Sometimes the men carrying the dixies had to drop flat to avoid flying splinters and then we had mud mixed with stew. How that line was held on such diet will for ever be a mystery to me. We lay in mud under a hail of high-explosive and shrapnel; gas and liquid fire alternated.

One night I was on patrol with three men, and we had orders to ascertain what work the Germans had done on a sap that they had pushed out; also to collect what information we could. We crawled over that ghastly and stinking wilderness, that had once been covered with flowers, corn, and fruit-trees. Before we had gone far we looked like big lumps of earth, and although the mud was most uncomfortable it made us less visible to the enemy. The cold white lights rose and fell regularly, and we crept gingerly towards the post. When we were about ten yards from it I heard voices, and my men were too far apart to hear me without danger, so I hurled a bomb into the sap where it exploded with a terrific din. It was about thirty yards from the German front line, and I was afraid reinforcements would come on the scene if we didn't hurry. Quickly throwing two more bombs, I jumped down into the sap head, and found two Germans lying in their blood. Machine-gun bullets were sweeping overhead, and the

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enemy realized that something untoward had taken place in the sap.

I crawled out just as a small group emerged from the German trench. My only hope was to escape in the darkness, as there were at least a dozen Germans. There was a deep shell-hole in the middle of No Man's Land and I crawled into it, for I heard German voices all round me, and realized that the enemy had a strong patrol out, and were behind as well as in front. I lay flat, hardly daring to breathe, knowing full well that I could expect no quarter after killing the two listeners in the sap. Once a small group of Jerries passed within a yard of me, and one actually threw himself into the hole where I was lying, when bullets swept uncomfortably near. It seemed ages before they went and for over an hour I held a bomb with the pin drawn resolved to throw it if I were discovered. Both sides were spraying bullets over my head and I followed the machine-guns as they traversed.

Several times I was tempted to crawl out, but the thought of getting riddled held me in check. Life was sweet, and when I remembered the white-faced wretches in hospital, with the pus from their wounds dropping into basins, I felt sick and stayed where I was. When dawn broke I found I had three corpses for companions. They were stiff and had burst their clothing. Large white maggots crawled about in the putrid flesh, and, when the day wore on, swarms of flies came to feast on the lumps of corruption. It was late in the year for flies, but probably good feeding had made them resistant. I watched maggots crawling in the holes where a man's eyes had been, until their wriggling got on my nerves. I tied a handkerchief round my face to keep out the smell which was almost unbearable.

That day seemed endless, but I knew only too well that, if I once showed myself above the hole, I would soon be feeding the maggots just like the rotten remains in the middle of which I lay. A leg lay some distance from the body. The flesh was blue and black and had shrunk, so that the leg seemed ridiculously thin for such a big boot. In the afternoon a piece of shell hit one of the bodies and

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tore the back in half. It was a mass of maggots, some of which were thrown over me.

When darkness came on I lay watching the chilly lights, wondering if it were safe to leave my funk-hole. I was nearly out when a whizz-bang burst a couple of yards from me, throwing me down among the putrid flesh, some of which went in my mouth, and I can taste the loathsome stuff to this day. Jerry started shelling heavily, but I could not tell if it were the prelude to an attack, or simply to harass our communications. Enormous shells roared overhead, like express trains puffing and panting up a steep slope. Although they burst at least four hundred yards away, the ground shook, the air trembled, and steel splinters dropped all round me. The sharp dry crack of rifle bullets made me keep low, but I was determined to make a last attempt to reach my company; a few more hours with the corpses and I would have been raving mad. My arms were in the mud up to the elbows, and the wire, old tins, broken rifles, and shell splinters cut my hands and knees.

A shell had fallen on an ammunition dump behind the British lines and the flames lit up the sky for miles around. Thousands of shells were bursting in the dump, and pieces of steel were falling like rain on leaves. It was nearly dawn when I came to some wire, and wondered if it were British or German, for I had got lost repeatedly, and the flares seemed to be going up all round. Lying flat I shouted in English and my heart jumped with delight when I heard a voice say: "Don't shoot, mates, there's some b—— out there trying to get in." I slithered down into the trench and heard a young officer exclaim: "Look, my Lord, it comes," as Horatio says to Hamlet when the ghost appears. I was bleeding from numerous cuts and scratches, caked with mud and pale as death. A man held up a small pocket mirror and when I saw myself I thought it was indeed a spectre. My face was dirty and eyes bloodshot. A cut on one cheek had dried, leaving a dirty stain round it. I found my way back to my company and was told that I had been reported missing. The men who had gone out with me never returned, and I have never found out



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what happened to them; they may have been taken prisoners.

We came out next day for four days and marched back to the cellars. I found a copy of Sterne's "Tristram Shandy" in three small volumes. I read passages to the men, and they roared with delight at Doctor Slop, widow Wadman, Uncle Toby, and Corporal Trim. Prudes may turn up their noses at Sterne, but there is no doubt that Carlyle was right, in classing him with Cervantes, among the great humorists of the world. The story of the hot chestnut was the favourite, and had to be repeated several times. The hard-bitten soldiers chuckled when the corporal maintained that soldiers standing in the trenches up to their knees in cold water, harassed, beat up in their shirts, benumbed in their joints, pray as heartily as any parson without his fuss and hypocrisy.

After two days in the cellars we heard that we were going to another part of the front, and the news was received with the greatest joy. We marched all day, as happy as sand-boys at the prospect of leaving the hell of the Somme, and going to a quiet part of the front. Towards evening we were tramping steadily along a road lined with trees, just like the avenue by Hobbema in the National Gallery, when a messenger galloped up with an order for the commanding officer. We halted and waited, wondering what could be afoot. Suddenly we were turned about, and, to our amazement, started back along the long and dreary road to Albert. The men cursed with the fury of despair, for they realized only too well that the sudden order meant fighting again as soon as they returned. We reached the ruined town at dawn, and were informed that we had to go back into the line that night to recapture some ground that had been lost. It was rumoured that the French Canadians had bolted and allowed Jerry to walk into their trenches, but no one knew precisely what had happened.

At dusk we fell in, as disgruntled a crew as could well be imagined. The going was heavy and we were thoroughly tired. A tank was lying on its side with mechanics working on it. Ambulances were stuck in the mud, and stretcher-bearers were trudging knee deep with their burdens. The

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lights were going up from all high ground, and never did a battle-field look more desolate. At the side of the road lay a shell as big as a torpedo, with some words chalked on it; it was too dark to read them. Desultory shelling was going on, and we watched the bursts apprehensively, for the guns seemed to be searching and sweeping the ground we had to cross.

To add to our miseries rain started to fall, and ran down our necks. We watched the coloured star shells, and hunched our shoulders when shrapnel burst overhead. As we approached the trenches, bullets whistled just over our heads, and salvos of enormous shells, from the guns behind us, hurtled over us to crash on the roads behind the German lines. Jerry retaliated, and we were thankful to get into the communication trench before the hellish fury made life impossible on the open ground. We stumbled over broken stakes and boards, dead men, and heaps of debris. Now and again cries were heard calling for stretchers, and I muttered a prayer my mother had taught me as a child. I asked God to protect me, and promised, as I had often done before under similar circumstances, to lead a better life if I were spared. I probably realized at the time that I had no intention of keeping my promise, but God was a kind of talisman with whom it was well to keep in touch.

The front line was almost non-existent, it had been knocked all over the place. The troops we relieved had lost heavily, and wasted no time in scampering away to safer places. There was no parapet worthy of the name, and the trench was blocked with earth and dead. Jerry had shelled it until most of the defenders were killed and buried. We heard that an elaborate creeping barrage had been arranged, and that we were to go over the top at 6.20 a.m.

The night was stormy and sleep was impossible. Long before zero hour we stood shivering, clenching our teeth to stop them chattering, and fixing our bayonets. We all looked pale except the Cardiff butcher, whose face was always a fiery red. The men called him Taffy, although he strenuously denied being Welsh, and always referred to the inhabitants of the Principality as "them bastards."

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"Keep yer mug high, monkey-face," admonished the skinny little railway man from Swindon, "if Jerry sees it sticking up he'll laugh so much that he won't be able to shoot."

"It'll take a damn good shot to 'it you," retorted the butcher; "if you stand sideways there's muck all to aim at."

Shaw started crooning a song called: "Blue eyes, true eyes, sweetest I ever knew," and I thought of a fat bitch who had sung it to us in hospital, making eyes at us as she sang. It was asserted that she ran a semi-private brothel in the town, and her ability as a singer enabled her to serenade the troops. After her songs she went round giving cigarettes to the men and her address to any likely clients.

Some of my companions tried to joke, but most of us were in no mood for that sort of thing, and were calculating our chances of escape when the moment would come to rush forward once more. I thought of my mother, of the meadows where I played as a boy and the little cove in Cornwall where I had often sailed my boat. Such pictures flashed through the mind and were gone almost before one could grasp them. A couple of men gave me letters to post in case they failed to return, and I handed one to a fellow addressed to my mother. I thought of the dead lying on the road from Albert, and felt like a rat in a trap just before the door is opened and the dogs get at the distracted rodent.

I was wiping the sweat of fear from my brow when the whistle sounded, and we ran out to meet the bullets. I crouched down and ran in a blue funk, for something told me my turn to get hit was long overdue, and although I did not fear death so much, I was sick at the thought of being blinded or crippled, and lying feverish with the pus dropping from my wounds. I saw several men fall and one turned a complete somersault, another sat holding his head which had been scalped by a piece of shell, and the blood blinded him. The most sickening sight was that of a boy who had been nearly cut in two, and tried to drag himself while the blood left a trail a foot wide. A man in front of me was hit in the face and fell in such a way that he tripped me up. I had one glance at his sightless eyes and hurried on.

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The wounded were lying groaning in pools of blood and calling for help; no one took any notice of them, for strict orders had been given that the wounded must be left for the stretcher-bearers, which meant that about ten per cent. could hope to be rescued. We exterminated the few Germans in their front line; they must have been withdrawing, for the trench contained one man for every two or three bays.

We pushed on and came to a cemetery in which many of our men had been buried side by side with the Germans. It surprised many of us to see: "Here rest in God," followed by the name and regiment of an English soldier. Two of our airmen had a bigger monument than the Germans. We lay near the cemetery watching the shells churning up the graves, and one body was thrown high in the air by a shell that burst underneath it. Other lumps were seen to go up and some of us said they were stumps of trees. That annoyed one man, who retorted with conviction: "What the 'ell are yer talkin' about? Trees don't wear boots, you bloody fools!"

The ruins of a village sheltered machine-guns, and we had been told that, if possible, we had to push on and occupy those heaps of rubble. There were no streets or anything resembling houses, simply shattered remains, and a big broken bell on a pile of debris where the church had been. We shot down the machine-gun crews, and, although one group put up their hands, they were not spared. It was dirty work but we were crazy with fear and the blood lust made us see red. At noon we were in the ruins and saw a tank coming to our assistance. It pushed over a machine-gun nest and buried the crew in the process. As we watched it, a German officer with a field gun surrounded by dead brought his gun into action, and disabled the tank with a direct hit; the crew must have been incinerated, for their steel prison burst into flames. It seemed to me that faster tanks would achieve great things, for their demoralizing effect was incalculable. They were able to flatten wire, shoot down the infantry in the trenches, and were immune from bullets. Of course it would only be a matter of weeks before Jerry would evolve a light portable

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gun capable of dealing with tanks, but even then they would be most useful for surprise attacks.

Both sides were shelling the ruins; our guns seemed to think the Germans were still among those heaps of bricks and boards, while the enemy knew full well that we were there. It was like a seething cauldron. Pieces of bricks, plaster, showers of dust and bodies, were flying up into the air. My platoon commander was smashed up by a whizzbang; what was left of him would not have filled a sand-bag.

I took my men and crawled round the smoking inferno. The sky was obscured by the black and white clouds of bursting shrapnel. Bullets were chipping the tops of the ruined walls, and we wormed our way with infinite precaution until a five-nine dripped in the middle of us and reduced our numbers by half. Among the killed was Frank Strong, one of the few survivors of the original company. About forty-five, he had been a business man in the Midlands, joining up as a private in the early days of the war. Like most of the 1914 volunteers he had become disillusioned and bitter. Wounded three times, he stuck it like a hero, but laughed sardonically when anyone came out with the old humbug about fighting for Belgium, humanity, and justice, against the powers of evil. He was fond of saying that we were fighting for power just like the other nations, but were too hypocritical to admit it.

Strong lived for a few minutes, and asked me to write to his wife and send her his gold watch. I was too busy to look for his watch, but, when we buried him, it was missing. In due course I wrote to his wife and she replied asking me if I was sure, as she had received no official notification.

At dusk I found myself in charge of twenty men, two Lewis guns, and a large supply of bombs, so we felt fairly safe for the time being. When the lights went up the Germans seemed to be all round us. I was puzzled and didn't know exactly what to do. It seemed stupid to hold out if there was no hope of rescue, but, on the other hand, we had received no orders to withdraw, and I hesitated between obeying orders and trying to avoid the useless sacrifice of men's lives. In the middle of my meditation

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a runner came from battalion H.Q. with a message that the post had to be held at all costs. I read it to the men and they took it very well, probably because they had expected it, and were too exhausted to make a fuss.

The night was sleepless for me as I expected Jerry to attack, but most of the men were able to snatch two or three hours' forgetfulness. I was glad it was a moonlight night, for we had no Vêry lights, and a sudden rush in the dark would have been the end of us. Twice an attempt was made to rush our little fort, but each time the Lewis guns scattered the enemy, who retired, leaving the ground strewn with dead. A few tried to creep towards us, but a shower of well-directed bombs flattened them out. I shot a German through the head while he was worming his way towards us, and when dawn broke saw that he had lost half a leg, and part of his buttocks had been sliced off. He had been crawling for help when I shot him.

The cheerless light of dawn brought us no respite. The enemy were on three sides of us, and our plight was desperate in the extreme. We crawled from hole to hole collecting iron rations and ammunition from the dead. The water-bottles were most welcome, for we suffered much from thirst. At about ten in the morning a German aeroplane came towards us flying low. We blazed away at him with our guns, but had to husband our ammunition, and each time Jerry dived at us his bullets sang about our ears and made us keep under cover. We had made fairly deep holes with our entrenching tools and a couple of spades found in the ruins, then pulled thick beams over our heads. I ordered the men not to fire, and to keep under cover. Jerry appeared to think we were exterminated and came so low that the black crosses were quite visible and then I saw the observer's face. Resting a Lewis gun on a beam, I took careful aim, and fired a good burst into the diving target. His two guns were spitting viciously, and only the excitement kept me from diving for cover, as the bullets whistled within a few feet of my head.

Suddenly I shouted with joy, for flames were bursting out all round the machine, small at first but soon twenty feet long, and the great bird dropped like a stone. One

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of the occupants jumped or dropped out, and fell like a sack of corn, turning over and over in the air. The raging furnace dropped about twenty yards in front of us, and even at that distance the heat was uncomfortable, for the wind was blowing in our direction. Jerry shelled the burnt-out machine for an hour, and although his shells dropped all round it, not one hit it. The worst of it was that many of them dropped within a few yards of our hole, and frightened us thoroughly, for if he had not stopped when he did we should have been obliterated.

One recruit, a pale kid of poor physique who had never been in action before, emptied his bowels in his trousers and had to take a pair from a dead man. Mike O'Reilly, a garrulous little Irishman, asked permission to crawl out and drag the German in. Paddy said the man might be only stunned, but I knew he simply wanted to see what was in the fellow's pockets. The dead German was only about ten yards from our fort, and, although Jerry wasted a lot of ammunition, Paddy dragged his prize in without getting hit. The dead man was about thirty, short, ugly and unshaven. Every bone in his body was broken and he had been riddled by bullets. While he lay on the ground, pieces of shell had further lacerated his poor body. Paddy got angry because the others claimed a share of any souvenirs that might be on the corpse, and appealed to me. I opined that since Paddy had risked his skin to bring the man in he was entitled to anything that might be procurable. I rather liked the little Irishman, for he was of a generous disposition. He was the laziest man I've ever met, always full of aches, pains and excuses. I often laughed at his ingenuity in dodging work, and, in spite of threats, hadn't the heart to punish him.

Mike always sang when he was preparing something to fill his belly. He stripped the German, hoping to get a clean shirt, but it was soaked in blood and holed in several places. However, the socks were new, whereas Mike's were smelly and in tatters. He tore a piece off the bloody shirt, removed his boots and socks, spat on his feet, and, after much rubbing, saw the skin appearing from under the crust of filth. All of us suffered at times from sore feet. During

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the long marches they perspired freely, and, in the line, we usually slept with our boots on, so that the socks became filthy and tattered rags. In happier days we carried a reserve pair, but that was no longer possible except for a fortunate few. Most of us followed Mike's example and were busy spitting on and rubbing our feet.

A German battery had evidently been asked to destroy us, for one of them started ranging, dropping shells all round our hole. It searched and swept with great thoroughness. We could hear the guns quite distinctly, they seemed to be hidden in a little copse about fifteen hundred yards away on the left front. I was amazed to notice that Mike was drunk; and under cross-examination he admitted having found a silver flask of cognac in the pocket of the dead airman. I was rather annoyed, for, in our desperate plight, we needed all our wits, especially if Jerry should attack. Each shell that dropped near sent showers of earth and stones rattling down into our holes. We had each scooped out a hole in the solid earth about six feet beneath the surface. The cubby-holes were horizontal and radiated from the side of the crater.

I was in a panic terror and recalled R. L. Stevenson's essay on "Pan's Pipes," especially where he says: "Earth wages war against her children," and I was wondering what terrible sins we had committed so that Pan should stamp so violently, when Jerry scored a direct hit on our central hole, and we were blasted like rabbits in a warren when a charge is fired at the entrance. I was stunned, and buried under a heap of earth that threatened to choke the life out of me. By squirming and kicking I got my head above the soil, and filled my lungs with acrid smoky fumes, while I drew my body out and tried to help the wounded.

The results of the burst were serious, five killed and two badly wounded, besides a number with cuts and scrapes. In the walls of the crater were embedded long jagged pieces of steel and the fumes made us cough. More shells came at us with such force that they shot into the ground with a loud, screaming, hissing sound, followed by an explosion that made the earth shake. We were like sailors in a boat; the earth rocked, trembled, rose and fell.



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As soon as the shelling ceased we rushed our Lewis guns to the surface and fortunately they were in working order. With tense faces we awaited the attack that could not long be delayed. A long line of figures in field-grey climbed out of the German trench and came loping towards us. We held our fire until they were about two hundred yards, then we blazed at them, and the ground was soon littered with their bodies. Their bayonets gleamed viciously and it was with satisfaction that I saw the wholesale slaughter. Some bombers started throwing their missiles, but they were too far away to do any damage. Jerry secured a footing about fifty yards from us and stuck up a board with the following inscription in big chalk letters:

*"You are in a hopeless position.  
If you surrender your lives will be spared.  
Further resistance will compell us to refuse  
quarter when your post falls."*

One of my men found a piece of chalk and asked me if he might answer Jerry's question. I said he could, provided he made it clear that we would not surrender. There was a faint chance of help coming, and I was determined to stick it as long as ammunition lasted. My action was no doubt due to pride and conceit, as much as to fear of appearing a coward in the eyes of my men, if I advised surrender. The man with the chalk worked at his task with his tongue sticking out, for writing was not his forte, and when he had finished he showed me his effort, which ran as follows:

*"Go to hell and tickle spiders,  
You square-headed bastards."*

I did not approve of the inscription, but felt too weary to object, and it was stuck up. Jerry riddled it and knocked it to pieces after a few minutes. I realized that after such an insult they would be in no mood to grant quarter, and resolved that as long as our ammunition held out they would not get any nearer without heavy losses. If no relief reached us by nightfall I was determined to give the order to retire.

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Mike was still drunk. He had rigged up a latrine which consisted of a pole across a hole in which was a saucer minus the handle. He sang as he sat on the pole. He then gave a recitation called: "Christmas Eve in the Workhouse," of which I recall only two or three lines.

"In strode the workhouse master  
And swore by all the gods,  
They'd have no Christmas pudding,  
The noisy lot of s—.  
Up spake a grimy pauper  
With a face as bold as brass,  
'We don't want yer Christmas pudding,  
You can stick it up yer a —."

The wounded were in a bad way, and looked as if they would soon kick the bucket. One man had lost both feet, and although we had diminished the flow of blood he badly needed attention. Another had been hit in the lungs and was vomiting blood. We were parched and desperately hungry. The day seemed endless, and I was thankful to notice darkness creeping over the desolate corpse-strewn ground. A trench mortar had been brought into action opposite us, and the bombs burst with terrifying effect. They came wobbling through the air like enormous bottles and their destructive power was terrific. I gave orders to abandon the crater and we dragged the wounded with us. Scarcely had we got clear when the *minnenwerfer* scored a direct hit in the crater, sending up a huge spout of earth, broken stakes, and pieces of bodies.

As we crawled away from the unhealthy place, a patrol came out from our lines with orders to retire. We continued to crawl over the shell-ploughed land, and were only a few yards from our front line when I felt a stinging and burning pain in the right thigh, and felt the blood running from two wounds. At the dressing-station the M.O. informed me that two bullets had passed through the flesh without doing any serious damage. The leg was stiff and I fainted, more from exhaustion than anything else.

When I awoke I was on a stretcher, being carried to an ambulance that was waiting, axle deep in mud, a mile or so from the trenches. I looked up at the sky where the

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stars twinkled clear and bright. The bearers stumbled about in the darkness, and when a shell dropped near they dropped me and fell flat. Several whizz-bangs screamed near, and I crawled into a hole, covered with mud and sick with pain. When things quietened down the two men came back, somewhat ashamed at having dropped me in the mud. In spite of the cold and discomfort I soon fell into a deep sleep.

The ambulance, the C.C.S., the train, and the arrival in hospital were more or less a repetition of previous experiences. I was bitterly disappointed to find that I was not booked for England and discovered that my destination was an American hospital in Paris. An ambulance took us from the train to the hospital, and on arrival I was bathed, and sank into a clean white bed where I enjoyed the first good sleep for many days.

The nurses were just out from America ; most of them were pretty, gushing, and of a good social class. I was glad it was a V.A.D., for in the military hospitals the discipline was more strict, and food not so good. The doctors were good fellows, breezy, and far more sympathetic than the average British Army medical officer, although there were notable exceptions of course. I was in a small ward of twenty-four beds ; a beautiful room with walls, ceiling, and furniture, a dazzling white. There were flowers near each bed, and the food was excellent. All the cases in my ward were clean wounds and we had great fun, playing cards, telling yarns, and smoking all day, to keep pace with the gifts that came every day. One man had a concertina which he was allowed to play quietly and we had some great sing-songs. All the old favourite ditties that we sang during the first weeks of training were warbled with renewed fervour. "Tipperary," "Pack up your troubles in your old kit bag," "Keep the home fires burning," "Good-bye-ee," "There's a long long trail a-winding," "Smile," "K-K-Katie," "Hello ! Hello ! Who's your lady friend ?" "Little grey home in the west," "John Brown's body," and many others made the welkin ring.

We forgot for the time being the horrors and disappointments of the war, and recovered something of the spirit

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that animated us, when, in 1914, we marched the dusty roads full of zest and enthusiasm, anxious to do well at drill so as to get to the front as soon as possible. My mind went back to those days which seemed to belong to some far-off age, when the world was young and clean and pleasant. We held ourselves favoured beyond our deserts in being allowed to fight for justice, truth, and common decency in international affairs. We held all men, on our own side, of course, to be honest, truthful and honourable, especially the parsons, politicians, and tub-thumping orators of all kinds. We never suspected that the war would produce the most heartless collection of profiteers the world has ever seen, that munition workers and miners would, by strikes and threats of strikes, hold a pistol at the nation's head, and extort from the Treasury more in a day than we earned in a month. I closed my eyes and saw the ragged men with whom I had drilled in the early days of August 1914 . . . then saw them rotting on the wire and the profiteers waxing fat, making money out of the nation's extremity.

One day a grand dame in nurse's uniform came to the ward, and, with much fuss, announced that I had been awarded a bar to the medal I held. It was for holding the crater, and I felt an impostor, for, in the absence of orders to retire, we had done nothing but what we were forced to do by the exigencies of the situation.

The day nurse was a charming minx who appeared to be enjoying Paris to the full when off duty, and who was not averse to mild flirtations when on. As soon as I was able to walk without a stick I helped her to make beds, sweep the floor, and bring things for patients who could not help themselves. In return I was granted substantial privileges, allowed to occupy a small room with private entrance on the ground floor, and, greatest boon of all, no restrictions were placed on my goings and comings.

The chief medical officer made use of me for translations and treated me more as an equal than a ranker. He was tall and powerfully built, dark, and looked like an old rancher. His face was clean-shaven, rugged and honest. He had seen service in the Philippines and had fought in

Cuba. He had few illusions about his fellow men, and professed to be a thoroughgoing determinist. In spite of that he was one of the kindest men I have ever met. His only regret was that he had never kept up his French, and could not carry on a conversation in that language.

One evening we went out to a *boite de nuit* in Montmartre and had a most enjoyable time. Major Dark smoked such strong cigars that the people near us started to cough. A girl danced naked on a table and prostitutes drank champagne. At one table a female in evening dress slipped out her breasts and held them up on a plate; they were tattooed in colours.

We then went to another night haunt at the foot of the funicular railway on the *Butte* and there saw a number of men, or at least males, dressed as women. They all wore high heels, evening dress and silk stockings; their faces were painted, and so well disguised that one would hardly believe they belonged to men. A number of society women and men were sitting and drinking, some looking bored, others amused. They danced the most indecent dances with chests and backs bare. All the pederasts had women's names and spoke in falsetto tones waving their fans languorously. A young man came in quite naked with a lion's skin over his shoulders. His eyes were dilated, he appeared to be under the influence of some drug. Throwing off his skin he danced in a most fantastic manner until he fell exhausted and a naked girl took his place.

We walked along the streets, had a drink at a big café in Place Clichy and talked to two prostitutes. Between Clichy and Place Pigalle we were accosted at least fifty times, and several impudent wenches tried to drag us into the dark side streets. We shook them off and went to a place called Hell, where we drank out of glasses shaped like skulls, and sat before tables shaped like coffins. A yellow light suffused the room and we looked like corpses. The waiters were dressed like undertakers. One of the guests was invited to stand at the end of the room and a coloured light played on him. Gradually he changed to a skeleton. It was done by mirrors, I suppose. Then a beautiful girl stood in the same place and undressed until

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she was naked. When the lights were turned up she was fully clothed. I got too drunk to remember what happened after that, and awoke next day with a splitting headache and a parched mouth. Dark came to see me and laughed when, in reply to his inquiry, I said I was feeling rotten. He had a book in his hand, and sitting near my bed he read as follows :

"France ! It is your power to see that 'soul in things' which we call Ideals, to bring to life the truths you have seen, and so to concrete and shape your vision, that it becomes the rock spiritual on which nations stand. Because you are the living incarnation of your clear, unflinching spirit, we others love you. You stand before the world, true embodiment of your three immortal words ; as your immortal tune is the true voice of a Land's ardour and devotion.

"France ! You have sloughed off the gross and the vain-glorious flesh of nations ! You are the flame in the night ! In this hour we see, and know you !

"Great and touching comrade ! Clear, invincible France ! To-day, in your grave chivalry, you were never so high, so desirable, so true to France and to humanity !"

"What do you think of that after what we saw last night ?" he demanded with a chuckle.

"It is hardly fair to judge a nation by a few haunts of vice," I replied, "they are to be found in every country."

"Yes, but they are worse in France than in any other so-called civilized land," he answered. "The French are a nation of immoral atheists and yet God will allow them, with the help of other powerful countries, to crush the Germans, a finer people in every way, more religious and more moral. Fancy Luther's people being crushed by that of Voltaire ! Talk about Sodom ! It was purity itself compared with what goes on here every night. This place is rotten to the core. While the men at the front are going through hell their wives are selling their bodies every night. There is no more morality in Paris ; it is the cesspool of the western world."

"I think you are very hard on France," I replied (he had forbidden me to say "sir" under pain of a crack on

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the jaw), "and surely you must admit that the French people are free from that horrible slimy hypocrisy that oozes out of America and England."

I became friendly with a young American doctor at the hospital. He was tall, fair, and handsome, had studied at Yale, and was now studying life in Paris. He had acquired a little French at school, but his accent would have made a cat laugh, and his vocabulary was far too limited to carry on a conversation. He could order drinks, bargain with ladies of easy virtue by holding up his fingers, and on the whole enjoyed himself to the full.

Our first outing together took us to the Latin Quarter. We explored some streets just off the Boulevard St. Michel, near the Boulevard St. Germain. The doctor wanted to see the different kinds of red lamps, and we entered one in the rue de la Harpe. We were passing a house with a red blind, when a woman standing at the door invited us to enter. Nothing loath, we walked in and found ourselves in a comfortable salon. The woman rang a bell and in marched eight females dressed in high-heeled shoes, silk stockings, and a silk shift as big as a pocket-handkerchief. They were of all sizes and ages. Two of them could not have been more than sixteen, and another looked about sixty, but had painted her face in a grotesque manner; she wanted to look young but only succeeded in looking horrible.

In a café near the Place de l'Opéra we met a beautifully dressed and refined-looking woman, who asked us if we would care to accompany her to her home. She was one of those enterprising persons who keep what are known colloquially as *poules de luxe*, and admittance to their abodes can only be obtained by recommendation. A taxi took us to the house in an avenue near the Arc de Triomphe; it was a veritable mansion. It contained thick carpets, valuable pictures, and good furniture. The dame took us to her room, and there we drank and smoked while she expatiated on the merits of her *pensionnaires*. She showed us their photographs, and asked us if we would be kind enough to recommend her to our friends. The pictures were of beautiful girls, and, in response to an electric bell, each came to be introduced. They appeared cultured and

spoke perfect French. Some were dark and looked like Italians, others were as fair as Scandinavians; they were truly *filles de joie* of a superior kind.

The doctor told the day nurse, Juliet, that I spoke good French, and she asked me if I would take her to some shows. She was young and pretty with considerable charm, and I was not slow to acquiesce. She told me she took up nursing mainly to get away from a home where it was a crime to laugh, and where an ardent fundamentalist ruled his family with a heavy hand. We discussed the extraordinary phenomenon of Puritans becoming gold grabbers and the finest nation of hypocrites the world has ever seen. According to Juliet, American education was purely utilitarian, degrees could be had in every subject under the sun from salesmanship to soul-saving; true scholarship and culture were neglected except by a passionate few, who usually worked under a professor imported from Europe. Juliet harboured no illusions about the greatness of her country. She realized sadly that in spite of its wealth, or rather because of it, the nation is like a vulgar parvenu, who buys up all the *objets d'art* he can get so that his neighbours may envy him. Thank God for an André Siegfried, a Sherwood Anderson, a Dreiser and above all a Mencken!

Juliet was a nice girl, full of high spirits; inclined to kick over the traces, which was only natural after her ghastly upbringing. When she left home she knew nothing about life, sex or birth. She was rapidly becoming *au fait* with such matters and enjoying life to the full. Like many other educated women she claimed that the economic emancipation of her sex must be followed by sexual emancipation and adduced good reasons in support of her thesis. In the past every roué expected to marry a pure little virgin, and rushed for a divorce if he discovered that she had done once what he had been doing for years.

We went to a music-hall, I think it was the Folies-Bergère, and saw what purported to be a revue. It consisted mainly of naked females, a few songs, and some lewd dances. At midnight we found a little café in Montparnasse. A tipsy artist was doing sketches on the tablecloth and, when he saw my companion, he secured a scrap



of paper, and, in an incredibly short time, produced a sketch that was an amazing likeness. Little groups at each table were chatting with that light-hearted insouciance so characteristic of the French temperament. We drank some good champagne and discussed whether America would ever enter the war. Juliet opined that, as America had lent big sums to the Allies, her compatriots would come in when there was a danger of their debtors being beaten, to save the almighty dollar. Most of the young Americans I met in Paris were disgusted with the official attitude of their country and its philosophy. One of them told me America would never produce any art worthy of the name until she passed through some great crisis that would bring poverty and suffering in its train.

One evening Juliet and I quarrelled over some stupid trifle. She wanted me to take her to a cinema to see a picture I thought silly, and suddenly, seeing that I was not inclined to go, she tossed her head and exclaimed rather tartly: "Very well, I'll soon find someone else to take me," and walked away. I went to her room later but she was not there, so, in high dudgeon I roamed the streets, and when tired of that entered a café, where I had a simple meal including a dish of bouillabaisse.

Next evening when I met Juliet, she confessed that she had wept most of the time, and that flattered my wounded vanity. We decided to explore some of the beauty spots round Paris and started off with Asnières, Colombes, Les Lilas. The Seine at Sèvres is beautiful beyond words, with the little island in the middle of the river. We bought Rousseau's "*Réveries d'un promeneur solitaire*," and went over the ground the author had traversed on his botanical expeditions. The air was sweet smelling, the views were ravishingly beautiful, and we tramped until we were too tired to go any further. Spots that were once right out in the country are now part of the city, and it was curious to read the letters of Madame Lebrun in which she describes the rustic delights of villages, where now nothing but factories and houses are to be seen. The church at Raincy stands out in my memory as one of the most extraordinary buildings I have ever seen. Some stretches of the Marne

with its poplars and willows are as beautiful as anything I've seen. I have not revisited those spots since the war, so do not know how far I was hypnotized by the beauty of my companion, and, of course, after the bloody filth of the trenches the quiet river with its trees seemed to me Elysium indeed.

We sat under the trees in a boat reading Hugo's "*Chansons des rues et des bois*" and I have never forgotten some of the verses over which we enthused. The name Jeanne comes several times in that poem and while I lay on the grass with Juliet I thought of Jean over the water; such is the heart of man, inconstant, and ever ready to seek pleasure where it may be found, like a bee flitting from flower to flower. Among the beautiful things we saw during our excursions were the rose windows at Saint-Denis, the woods at Vincennes, Versailles, which is surely one of the most magnificent and artificial places in the world, where the social life of the seventeenth century was concentrated.

The village of Magny is one of the most charming I have ever seen, and is coupled in my mind with La Roche-Guyon. Our last excursion was to Moret at the side of placid waters, peaceful and altogether delightful. We spent the night there in a quaint old inn, and in the morning watched the mist rising from the ancient stones and crumbling arcades.

Two days later Juliet was recalled home as her mother was seriously ill, and not expected to recover. We swore eternal constancy and I suppose we really meant it. After her departure I wandered aimlessly about the city, and being tired of inaction asked the M.O. to mark me fit. He laughed when he heard my request and said:

"What the hell d'yer want to go and get yer quietus now for? Why not lie low here until it's over? You've done your bit, let others do theirs."

"I'm fed up to the teeth with doing nothing," I replied, "and crave for action, which I shall probably curse like blazes as soon as it comes my way. The trouble is that we cannot regulate the dose and when excitement comes we get too much of it; we're either bored to death or frightened out of our wits, there's no happy mean."

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I spent a few more days in Paris. One evening I went to a *bal musette* in a room behind a café. The dancers were mainly loose girls and apaches. All smoked cheap cigarettes, and when a couple wanted a rest they went to the side of the room, drank cheap wine, kissed and caressed to their hearts' content. I got hold of a fine beautiful girl of the gypsy type, and we danced together for a long time. She was the picture of what I had always imagined Carmen to be. She told me that her lover was in prison for stabbing a man in a quarrel, and that he would kill her if he saw her dancing with another man. The band was perched up near the roof, in shirt sleeves, working like fury. The tobacco smoke was so thick that one could only see a few yards.

We were just discussing whether we should go elsewhere when shouts were heard and knives flashed. A man was stabbed to the heart, the lights went out, and we made good our escape in the darkness. My companion told me her name was Rosalie and invited me to go home with her. I accepted and we drove there in a cab. It was a miserable district, Belleville, I think. We left the cab and entered a house in a narrow dark street. Rosalie took me upstairs and into her bedroom.

While she undressed I examined the door and found it had no lock or bolt. That aroused my suspicions, and, telling her I was going to the lavatory, which was on the landing, I left the room quietly and, going downstairs, peeped into the kitchen, where two rascals were sitting over a bottle of absinthe. The door was ajar and they were fuddled, otherwise they would have noticed me. One was sharpening a long knife on a stone and they discussed what they would do with my body after I had been done in. They used the word *zigouiller*, which I didn't understand at the time, but it did not require much imagination to guess what they were up to.

I went to the front door on tiptoe and found it had been locked and the key removed. I had a revolver in my pocket and resolved that I would use it if necessary. Going upstairs again I found Rosalie partly undressed and urging to me to hurry. I drew my revolver and told her sharply to keep quiet if she valued her life. Then I ordered her to

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knot three or four sheets together and let them down from the window.

Just as she was doing the job I heard steps coming up the stairs, and saw one of the ruffians coming at me with a knife at least a foot long. Quick as thought I shot him in the right shoulder and he fell with a moan. Rosalie tried to grapple with me and I had to hit her a terrific crack over the head with the butt. She fell stunned, and I was walking towards the door when the light was turned off, and the place plunged in darkness.

I looked out of the window and saw that the sheets would just reach to the street. As I looked I heard a stealthy noise in the room and realized that the companion of the shot apache was after me. Slipping off my shoes, I made for the darkest part of the room and waited until my antagonist was in the faint light that came from a street lamp. He also had a wicked-looking knife in his fist and undoubtedly meant business. The wounded man lay groaning on the floor but was too drunk to be dangerous. The other fellow kept muttering that he would do for me, and I decided to put him out of action. Kneeling down I took careful aim and shot him through the legs. He fell with a frightful string of oaths, and, with a sigh of relief, I heard the knife clatter on the floor.

Creeping downstairs I switched on the light and went up to examine my victims. Both smelt strongly of absinthe and were quite drunk. I probably owed my life to that fact. I bound all three with strips cut from the sheets and explored the house. It was most dirty and sordid. One room was full of what was obviously stolen property, and many men had entered that house with the beautiful Rosalie and left it in a sack. Men's effects were piled up in a corner, cloaks, suits, gloves, and even a couple of opera hats. Unable to find the key I climbed out of the window, and, finding a cab at the corner, drove home, only stopping once on the way to swallow a glass of brandy.

During the adventure I had remained perfectly calm ; it was less exciting than a patrol. Next morning I scanned the papers but could find no mention of the affair. I was given a warrant, and, after saying good-bye to patients and

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staff, I set out to find the battalion which was still on the Somme.

Jerry had retreated, destroying everything behind him. The British thought such tactics unfair, as if war were some parlour game. It was as legal to sink our ships as it was for us to blockade Germany in such a way that thousands died as a result of malnutrition. A retreating army would be foolish indeed to leave houses and shelters of all kinds for the pursuers to utilize. England did not want to use gas or aerial bombs and a good many other things that she was forced to use before the end. As General Crozier has pointed out, it is better to eradicate war than to build up false hopes that it can be waged by any means other than brutishness. There are no rules in war, victory justifies everything.

## CHAPTER XX

IT was winter and we were lying in a sea of mud. The stretcher-bearers waded in the slime up to their waists. Often I watched them struggling along and, when a shell burst near them, lose their balance, and let the wounded man drop into the mud, where he remained if the shelling continued, drowned as effectively as a dog in a sack.

We spent two weeks in water-logged holes scraped out anyhow, shelled nearly every day, gaining a few yards from time to time, and enduring the worst physical discomforts men could ever be called upon to face. The cold wet weather sapped our resistance, our faces were flaccid and colourless, the mud seemed to have eaten below the skin. In the middle of December we heard we were leaving the Somme. The news was received with satisfaction, but there was little visible rejoicing, we were too exhausted and disgruntled. I thought of the comrades who had marched down to the Somme only a few months before, brown, sturdy, and full of zest; now most of them were lying in the countless cemeteries whose crosses rose up on all sides; one was numbed by the thought that, under every little stick, lay the remains of a man who left home in the full flush of youth, health and enthusiasm. Countless others had no known grave, we walked over them, dug them up in the trenches, and unearched them when filling sand-bags. Sometimes in the parapet a coat was found to contain a corpse, boots lying behind the trench had bones and decayed flesh in them, and thigh bones tripped one up.

We marched back one wet night, and covered twenty miles before having food or a real rest. As we passed some ruins a big shell came hurtling over, and burst with a roar that made us drop, and many men were hurt by falling bricks and pieces of wood. We were so footsore and weary

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that every step was an effort. A little Cockney whose boots were hurting him cursed with venom. He assured us that he would go to the quarter-bloody-master and get satis-mucking-faction.

Billets were ruined houses, cold, wet and phantom-like. We found a candle, and my section crowded into a small room with wet straw on the floor, sacks over the window, and cracks in the ceiling through which rain dripped all night. We were in a sad plight, troglodytes with filthy bodies and blistered feet. We put ground-sheets on the straw and huddled together, snoring like hogs; we didn't even take our jackets off.

I awoke early, stiff and sore in every joint. The smell of sweaty bodies and stinking feet was overpowering. The pump would not work, and we washed in green slimy stuff taken from a stagnant pond. We were able to clean off some of the filth during the day, but no clean shirts were available, and in the afternoon we sat in the yard picking lice off our garments. It had become such a habit that we thought nothing of it, and talked nonchalantly while throwing the vermin in the mud.

I spent part of the afternoon exploring the neighbourhood and doing some shopping for the Q.M.S. There was one fine mansion in the village, and it was occupied by the A.S.C. I noticed washing hanging on a line in the garden, and made up my mind to investigate after dark.

All was quiet when I climbed over the wall late in the evening and crept up to the drying garments. There were half a dozen silk shirts, several pairs of good quality socks, and some excellent Jaeger underpants. A gramophone in the house was grinding out a popular tune ("If you were the only girl in the world"), and sounds of merriment floated on the cold evening air. It was the A.S.C. at war. I rolled up all the garments, and, on payment of five francs, got a hot bath in a café. Those who have never been weeks without a change or bath, filthy and caked with dirt, eaten up by lice, smelly, and chafed, with black blistered feet, will never realize what a hot bath with plenty of soap, followed by a clean change, can mean. Returning to the billet I found a piece of cardboard and printed on it the following

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message: "Try this for a change and you will realize what fighting soldiers have to put up with"; then I pinned it to the tail of my lousy, stinking shirt, and pegged it to the line from which I had stolen the washing.

We moved off next day, and as we passed the A.S.C. billet I scanned the beefy arrogant officers strutting about, and wondered which one I had robbed.

We did the journey in easy stages, and five days later found ourselves in the Lens district. A period of dreary drilling followed, and we were once again made up to strength. Our first trip saw us in the ruins on the edge of a mining village. We were about a hundred yards from the enemy, and in front of a school, or the remains of one, to be precise. The machine-guns chipped pieces out of the wall, just over our heads, but did little damage. The weather was very cold and it froze every night. That must have been one of the coldest winters on record, but it was dry on the whole, and we kept healthy. We were able to get a little coal, mostly dust, from a pit-head on our left, but it was a risky business, even after dark. One night I went for some with a little Derby man who was proud of the fact that he had been a clerk in civil life (not a common labourer, don't you know), although his intellect was on a par with that of Tom Smith, the latrine orderly, the dullest man in the company. The clerk was always near the fire but would never go for coal, so I compelled him to accompany me. He was in a blue funk and had never been above ground with bullets whizzing so close. He was holding the sack while I filled it, and suddenly he fell sprawling over me with a bullet through the head. He gasped: "Why did you make me come?" and died. I felt sorry for the miserable worm. In the course of my army life I found that the plain labouring man, utterly devoid of pretensions, was infinitely preferable to the clerk who thought the Matriculation certificate the hall-mark of culture. The navvy or dock labourer is usually a decent fellow, but the smug clerk, with the smatterings of knowledge and no culture, is, as a rule, the most detestable prig one can meet. I dragged the clerk back and he was buried next day. The coal dust soon gave out and we started fetching wood from



the school, breaking up blackboards, desks and even staircases. It was done surreptitiously, and, as the school had been hit by a score of shells, it did not matter much whether we burnt the contents, or left them to be further destroyed by enemy action and rain.

One night I was breaking pieces of wood across my knee, and suddenly I cursed with pain, for a big rusty nail had penetrated the side of the knee-cap. For several nights I suffered the most excruciating pain; the affected part was as big as a football and I got no sleep. Finally I had to report sick and was carried to the M.O. in a village three miles back. He probed the place; painted it with iodine and bandaged it. Hot poultices were put on daily and in a week I was able to walk. It was with much relief that I bent the leg for the first time as the M.O. said I might have a lame leg for life.

When I was sent back to the company it was out in billets. We spent Christmas in the trenches, and decided to have a celebration, to make up for what we lost by spending the festive season in the line. The officers' servant, Rhodes, who had been away wounded, and whom I had not seen for months, gave me a bottle of whisky, and we went to his abode to sample it, as I was with the section in a squalid kitchen, and there would not have been a tot each if the bottle had been divided among so many.

The officers were in a big house that had been hit several times, but the engineers had strengthened it, and the ground floor was fairly safe, with beams and sand-bags above and all round. Rhodes had a dug-out in the garden; quite a pleasant abode, light and airy. As he was the only occupant he was able to keep it clean. An old couple lived in the ruins, the caretaker and his wife. They had been left in charge of the mansion before it had been badly damaged, and the owner, a wealthy widow, was too frightened to come near the war zone. Sometimes the couple wandered round the grounds in the evening and spoke to me of bygone days, when the park was fully of leafy trees, and flowers bloomed on every side. At first it was hoped that the house and grounds were far enough from the fighting to escape destruction, but one day a shell took off part of the roof,

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and at irregular intervals others crashed into the building and converted stately rooms into heaps of rubble. M. Samain and his wife lived in the cellars, and, whenever the old man went out, his wife was terrified. One day he was missing and she came to me in tears, sure that her poor husband had been killed. I searched the village, and found him blind drunk among some troops who were having a celebration. I liked the old couple and have often wondered if they survived the war. Their only son was killed after a few weeks at the front, and as we walked and talked in the devastated park I felt intense pity for them.

Rhodes, the servant, and I were celebrating when the bell rang and he looked rueful, as, if it was suspected that he had been drinking, he stood a good chance of being returned to duty. He returned grinning broadly, and announced that the officers were also having a celebration, and were more drunk than sober, wearing paper hats and acting the fool. They wanted Rhodes to fill the carbide lamp and we put two or three lumps in, so that it had to be replenished every few minutes. Each visit enabled him to pinch the remains of a bottle of whisky, for they were now too drunk to notice what he was doing.

The company commander, a regular with a good record who had been with us only a few weeks, had a quarrel with a young lieutenant who knew nothing about his job but was always trying to show off. The C.O. was a small man but hard as nails. He had been on the gymnastic staff at Aldershot, and had a reputation as a fighter. The lieutenant was a much bigger man and thought that his physical advantages would be too much for his opponent. I wanted the lieutenant to have a good thrashing, for he was a swine to the men. They came into the back garden to fight, and we watched from the dug-out entrance. The big fellow hit the air with some terrific swings but failed to connect, and was soon thoroughly exhausted. The C.O. ducked, swayed, side stepped, and was far too elusive for his clumsy antagonist. When the lieutenant started to puff and pant the other made a chopping block of him, and knocked him out after a few punishing blows to the face and body.

As soon as the fight was over we resumed our libations

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and consumed all available supplies. Then we discovered a bottle of gin, but the taste was unpleasant, so we mixed it with condensed milk. Rhodes went to the mess and returned with rum, lemons and sugar. The mixing was an elaborate affair and he produced what he called a gin-sling. Growing eloquent we discussed the only perennial topic, the prospects of peace. Rhodes got married just before he enlisted, and showed me photographs of his wife, a beautiful girl. He cursed the war and all it entailed: "Why the hell should I rot out here while she sleeps alone night after night? Can you blame her if she seeks consolation in the arms of another? I haven't been faithful, it's too much to expect. They talk about the war in the home papers as if it were something grand, heroic, chivalrous, sublime. Those who talk like that should be made to lie in the filth as we have to, and they would realize that war is nothing but bloody blasted hell." He was excited and kept banging his fist on a box. I eyed him coldly, took a gulp of gin-sling and repeated sententiously a favourite phrase of old Sampson's:

*"Dulce bellum inexpertis."*

I fell asleep over the table and awoke in the middle of the night almost frozen. Rhodes was missing so I went in search. He was lying in a shallow hole, wet, cold and groaning. I dragged him in and lit a big fire, by smashing up his table and stool. He came round gradually, but would undoubtedly have been frozen to death before morning. After the war I met Rhodes and his wife. She was a charming girl and said quite seriously: "I cannot understand why some writers pretend that men behaved badly in France, for George never drank and was faithful through it all."

Next day I had a violent headache and felt really ill. An old soldier advised me to have what he called a livener, and a stiff tot of rum put me right, although when I tried to write a letter my hand trembled too much, and I had to abandon the attempt. In the evening I was invited up to the sergeants' mess. They were temporarily housed in a large cellar and appeared very comfortable. Doyle, a big Irishman, announced that he would give an exhibition of

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tight-rope walking. A thick wire had been stretched across the room for drying clothes. It was securely fastened to the walls by means of iron pins, but was not intended to bear a couple of hundred pounds. Doyle put a chair on the table, climbed on to it and fell across the wire. It collapsed and he crashed to the floor, overturning the table and breaking a number of bottles. A howl of execration went up, for he had spilt much good liquor. We indulged in the most extravagant horse-play, told yarns and sang songs. It was early morning when I retired with another thick head.

We went back to the trenches a few days later and began preparations for a raid. The ground was covered with snow and each man was given a white smock. On the day before the raid a curious thing happened in the trench. We had been teasing a recruit who had just arrived from England. He was a poor specimen, with drooping moustaches and bent shoulders. He described himself as a traveller, because he had been in the habit of peddling buttons and thread from house to house. He was extremely nervous and trembled when we described the horrors of going over the top. One of the men took an empty Mills bomb, stuck some T.N.T. in it, released the handle, and tossed it, so that it landed at the feet of "Windy Willie" as we called him. He gave a leap and a yell, collapsed, and was dead when we reached him. The M.O. said he had a weak heart and the shock had killed him.

Several nights passed without bringing any more snow; then it came down hard one morning and continued after dark. We dashed over without any artillery preparation, cut the wire silently, and were in the German trench before they realized that anything was wrong. Not a machine-gun was fired, and the sentries were stabbed and bludgeoned before they could offer any resistance. We threw enormous bombs down the dug-outs, and they burst with terrific blasts, shaking the ground, and burying the wretched men, who were asleep when their shelters were shattered. A group of us made for a big *minenwerfer* that had been doing a lot of damage, and blew it up with a stick of gelignite.

All round us men were shouting, swearing, shooting and

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stabbing. I lost my knife, but picked up a club with big brass spikes all over the knob. As I ran round a corner of the trench I came face to face with a big German. He wore spectacles and was palpably nervous; while he was making a half-hearted lunge at me with a knife, I smashed his face with the club and seized his knife when he went down, his face bloody and horrible to look at. Many of our men were lying dead, for the Germans were recovering from their surprise, and putting up a vigorous resistance. I came upon a Jerry lunging at a man in my section with a bayonet, and I was just in time to plant my knife between his shoulders. It came out covered with blood and the *mélée* continued.

To this day I don't know how I came out of it alive. On several occasions bullets whizzed past my head and a knife cut my sleeve. There was no time to be frightened, and we fought in the bloody snow and whirling smoke like fiends from hell. It was usually the cowards who were killed in such battles, although of course the bravest had no guarantee of returning. When the whistle sounded we dashed back through the snow and met a terrific barrage from the German guns. I slithered and fell several times, and was half-way across the dreary waste when a piece of shell case caught me in the back. It hit me with such force that I was knocked flying into a shell-hole, on top of two French skeletons in uniform. The bones rattled. They must have been there a long time, for the rats had picked them clean. With some anxiety I felt my back and was relieved to find it was only bruised and bloody. The piece of casing that had done the damage was lying near me. It was flat and weighed about a pound. It hit with the flat surface and was spent, otherwise it would have cut me in two.

The barrage was still severe and the machine-guns were in full blast, so I decided to stay where I was. It was very cold and snowing hard, my feet and legs were wet, through falling in a pool; my teeth chattered and I shivered violently. Searching about among the tattered uniforms I found a water-bottle containing what had once been wine, but the contents had decomposed and smelt of vinegar.

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The blue uniforms were too rotten to be of any use, and I was afraid that if I stopped in the hole much longer I would freeze to death. My feet were so cold that I could not move my toes, so I took off my boots and rubbed the skin with a rough piece of cloth.

After three hours, although the bullets were still thick, I decided that it would be better to get wounded or even killed than to lie and die of exposure. My progress back to our lines was slow and painful, for I had to crawl all the way. Many of the raiders were lying dead, and some were badly wounded; they would die of exposure. One youngster had lost a foot and an arm. The snow all round him was red, and he groaned loudly as I came near. Hardened as I was, it was impossible to leave him, so I tied up his wounds with dressings taken from the dead. Getting him back was a most difficult job, for his wounds were such that he could not crawl, and I had to drag him. Just as we got near our lines I called out, and was answered, so started to carry my comrade over the parapet. He was hit in the body just as I started to lower him, but was still breathing when the stretcher-bearers took him away.

In spite of the intense cold I was sweating, and went into a dug-out to examine my back. It was very stiff and the shirt was covered with blood. The platoon commander told me to go to the dressing station, and there I was again inoculated. I wanted to go back to the company as the wound was not serious enough to enable me to get to England, and I was sick of hospitals at the base. However, I had no option, and was sent to a hospital near Boulogne.

It was a comfortable place, but I hated seeing men going to England every night, when I knew I was condemned to return to the trenches without crossing the water. The food was not very good, and as soon as I could get out I went into town with a Canadian to have a good feed. My new acquaintance was a Welsh miner who had gone out to Manitoba to farm six years before the war, and was doing well when the war broke out. He was in the bed next to mine, and as soon as I heard him speak I knew he was Welsh. He was a typical Taffy, short, dark, ebullient and religious, although his piety did not prevent him from

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going into all the brothels he could find. He always got excited when arguing, and was an irascible little fellow, but good hearted. I met him again during the attack on Vimy Ridge in April, 1917, when he lost a leg. One night Taffy was telling us about the ponies down pits and we pretended to be sceptical. That aroused his wrath and he screamed :

" But I've seen the bloody things, I tell you ; I've worked with 'em, surely you can believe me ? "

" Whose leg are you trying to pull ? " we roared.

" God Almighty ! You might be decent enough to believe a bloody feller. Why should I tell muckin' lies ? "

" But how could they get horses down pits ? " queried a voice two beds away, " and what would they do with all the manure ? It wouldn't be possible to work in manure, not for Englishmen at any rate, although Welshmen would probably like it."

Taffy saw red and had to be forcibly restrained. After awhile he calmed down, but whenever he started about his ponies down pits we pretended to be sceptical, and enjoyed his discomfiture.

Taffy and I went into town, and, finding a quiet café, had a tremendous feed. I cannot recall all we ate, but it was a curious meal in which tinned fish, tinned fruit, cheese, and omelet, were swilled down with copious draughts of wine. The girl who served us was a forward hussy, so we left immediately the meal was over and went to a disreputable bar, where a number of soldiers were drinking and singing. Several girls were acting as waitresses, and when not fetching drinks were sitting on the soldiers' knees, hugging and kissing them. We danced with the wenches and one of them wanted me to go upstairs with her. She was a pretty little thing and I was sorry to see her in such a place.

I was treating her to a glass of something, when I saw two military policemen coming towards the drinking-saloon. The place was out of bounds for soldiers in hospital, so Taffy and I dashed down to the cellar of which the trap-door was open. We tumbled down the ladder and fell over some barrels at the bottom. At the far end was a light, and, creeping towards it, we saw it was another trap-door through

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which waning daylight poured. There was a great commotion upstairs and we could hear the police threatening to search the house. Suddenly there was a great scuffle and, climbing up, we saw the two red-caps being roughly handled by the troops, who tied them up and then, dragging them out into the yard, turned the hose on them. The landlord was absent and the woman in charge was helpless. Taffy and I seized the opportunity to "beat it," as he expressed it, for it was stupid getting into trouble unnecessarily, and we were due back at the hospital.

Next day I picked up a book called "A Rebours," by Huysmans, and sat up half the night reading it. In the preface, written twenty years after the novel, Huysmans who in the interval had become a pious Catholic, tries hard to excuse himself for having written such a book. The curious hero of the work is one Des Esseintes, who is morbid and decadent in every possible way. The book is a series of filthy scenes wrapped up in an odour of mysticism. Years later I read Oscar Wilde's "Picture of Dorian Gray," and was struck by the resemblance between the two books. Des Esseintes meets a boy in the street and takes him to a brothel, where he deposits sufficient money for the lad to lie with a woman once a fortnight for three months. By that time the youth will have acquired a taste for luxurious amours and, rather than be deprived of them, will murder and steal to satisfy his carnal lusts; so Des Esseintes will have produced an enemy of society! The book, neurotic and morbid as it is, is written with much talent; it is an able study of a diseased soul.

Next day I went back to the base camp and loathed the place more than ever. It was drilling all day, and in the evening we were so tired that we simply lay down in the tents; the town was about ten miles distant. On the second day after my arrival we had to pass through a chamber filled with gas. One or two recruits looked scared, and, while we were standing in the middle of the gas-filled hut, a kid pulled his mask off and rushed out spluttering. He thought he was choking and got badly gassed as a result. I was fond of bombing, for throwing always appealed to me, and my old cricketing instincts were satisfied when the



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bomb burst on the target. The instructor was inclined to show off, and one day threw a bomb that failed to clear the parapet. He rushed to throw it again but it went off and made a sad mess of him. He was buried next day.

I pestered the office until they sent me up the line again, and I found the company where I had left it. The raid had been a success, for information had been obtained from prisoners. Not more than two hundred of our men returned out of the thousand who went over; some were probably prisoners, but the majority were dead, as I had seen with my own eyes.

The brutality of raids always revolted me. Men became as mad beasts and slaughtered each other with a tigerish ferocity. On both sides men were shot and bayoneted with their hands up. In the past, wars may have been chivalrous, but raids are the *modus operandi* of thugs. To destroy men in their sleep and unarmed, seemed peculiarly horrible to me, but nothing is too depraved for modern war. No civilian will ever believe what men can do when maddened with blood-lust. When I returned from the last raid my club was red with blood, my knife was bent at the point where it had struck a bone, and my hands were sticky with thick blood.

The night after my return to the company a German came over at night and gave himself up. He was a cute fellow and talked readily, although he refused to give any information that might have been of military use. The company commander tried hard to get such information out of him, but it was useless. I was detailed to question the prisoner and the interrogation was more or less as follows:

"Where are the guns of your field artillery situated?"

"Somewhere in the rear, I suppose."

"Remember that if you refuse to give information you are liable to be shot."

"No, sir! You would never shoot a man for refusing to betray his comrades."

"What is the *moral* of your regiment like at present?"

"I really could not say."

"Are you intending to attack?"

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"That I couldn't say; a private soldier knows nothing of such matters until the attack is going to be launched, or a few hours before at most."

He was a fellow of medium height and extremely self-possessed. The captain threatened him with a revolver, and even discharged it near his head, the bullet entering the wall a foot from him, but Oscar Otto did not flinch. He asked what we were going to do with him, and, when I said he would probably be sent to England, he replied that the British fleet was at the bottom of the sea, so we would have to keep him in France. They had been fed on lies just as we had. When I asked him why he deserted, he replied:

"Because I've had enough; two years in the trenches and three wounds. I'm the only member of the original platoon left, and the thought of finishing this winter in the line, and getting polished off as soon as the fighting starts with renewed ferocity next spring doesn't appeal to me at all. It is time the *dulce et decorum est pro patria mori* stunt be shown up. The youth of Europe rushed into this war because they sought excitement, but they will have learnt a lesson before it's over." He said a good deal more which I have forgotten, but even while I cross-examined him under the eye of a couple of officers I could not conceal a smile, for Otto and I agreed about the stupidity and futility of the war.

We met again when it was over, and drank beer in an old-world garden in Leipzig. Three of his brothers were in the war, two were killed and the third badly wounded. Oscar was sent to the rear, and spent the next two years in a prisoners-of-war camp on Salisbury Plain. When we discussed the war after it was over, my German friend agreed that on both sides atrocities were committed by the blood-lust generated by propaganda and the heat of battle. Often prisoners were shot because food was scarce and men had to be detailed to look after them. It was not uncommon before an attack for orders to be passed round that no prisoners were to be taken, and men were murdered with their hands up. Oscar Otto told me his companions fought to the last man very often, because they had been warned that the British tortured their prisoners.

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We left the trenches four days later and marched to a park round a big *château*. The weather was atrocious, the tents old and leaking, and a number of men went down with pneumonia. One fellow was so fed-up that he stood out in the rain one night and lay down soaking wet. He got to hospital all right but not to blighty, for they buried him a week later. He was a delicate chap and ought not to have been at the front.

We welcomed hard frost, for it was infinitely preferable to the wet, which made life so unbearable when one could not dry one's clothes. Doing sentry-go on a cold wet night was most unpleasant, and I had to do such duties again for a foolish piece of indiscretion. One evening I went off with a pal to a near-by village, and we were reported absent by the C.S.M., who was a fine soldier but a bit of a martinet. He was a big bald man and had served in India for many years—a devoted slave of the military machine. He met his death under curious circumstances which I shall relate in due course.

Jim Watkins, who in civil life had been a bookie's tout, was a most interesting chap, and we became good friends. He was tall, thin, and hard as nails; had got into trouble with the police and joined the army to avoid prison. We sat in the tent one evening cursing the rain, and sighing for the delights of a small town about ten miles away. Jim said suddenly:

"It's no good sittin' 'ere cursin' like bloody cowards, let's go, and b—— the consequences. What d'yer say, corp.?"

"Well," I replied, "it's certain Roper (the C.S.M.) will have us for the high jump if we are not back in time, but I'm so sick of this wet tent that I don't care very much what happens."

"As long as we're back by reveille it'll be all right," answered Jim, and we proceeded to get ready. He was broke but I had plenty of money, for there was little temptation to spend it. The rain continued to pour down, and flashes of lightning alternated with terrific peals of thunder. However, we had made up our minds, and nothing would turn us back.

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When we had gone a mile or so down the road, we espied an orderly holding two horses outside a big house, that was probably a headquarters of some kind. Jim thought it would be a good idea to ride, and was not long in thinking out a plan. Telling me to wait down the road he went to the house by a side gate, and, coming out of the front one, said something to the soldier minding the horses, who handed them over and went into the house. Jim mounted one, and I took the other as soon as he came to the spot where I stood.

"How the hell did you manage it?" I asked.

"I told the orderly he was wanted inside and that he was to wait until a message would be handed to him. That means he will wait an hour or two, so we are not likely to be stopped."

"But what are we going to do with these animals when we've no further use for them?"

"The earth is vast enough surely to lose a couple of 'orses," replied the imperturbable Jim, sticking his heel into the sides of his mount, which needed no prompting, and went off at a sharp trot. My stirrup-leathers were much too short and I was doubled up like a jockey.

We reached the town after trotting for nearly an hour, and tied up the animals in the yard of an inn. I told the ostler to give them a good rub down and feed, promising him a tip when we returned. We then set out to explore the place, with that delightful anticipation that soldiers have, after a long spell away from the amenities of civilization. The rain had stopped, the moon shone behind scudding clouds, and the night promised to be beautiful. At the corner stood an inn with a quaint sign depicting a cat and underneath was the legend: "AU CHAT QUI PELOTE." We went in and found the bar deserted, so sat near the stove and called for cognac.

Jim was most grateful when I refused to lend him money and insisted on treating him. He was amazed when I admitted I had never seen the big race on Epsom Downs known as the Derby.

"Gor' blimy! Yer don't say yer've never seen the Derby, corp.? It's one of the sights of England, with the

tipsters, the gipsies and all the gentry. Many a time 'ave I stood givin' tips on the Downs, or rather sellin' 'em. Then when I'd made a few quid I put it on a bleedin' 'orse, lost the bloody lot an' 'ad ter walk all the way 'ome, unless I could cadge a lift or 'ang on be'ind a cart. More 'an once I 'id in the lavatory on the train and locked the door until we got ter the smoke. But that was risky an' I was caught at last an' got seven days."

It was nearly midnight when we decided to look for the horses. As we stood in the doorway I looked down the street, and saw a military policeman outside the inn where we had left the horses. He saw us at the same time, and I was pretty sure he had found the horses and was waiting to nab us. I grabbed Jim and we walked in the opposite direction, but the red-cap gave chase and we ran like hell, for horse-stealing was a serious offence. Unfortunately we had drunk rather a lot, and, although we had a start of at least three hundred yards, that policeman would have caught us in a very short time, for he was a good runner. As we sped round a corner we came upon a number of army bicycles up against a wall. They probably belonged to messengers attached to headquarters on night duty. Jim whipped out his knife, slashed the tyres of four machines and we mounted the remaining two, pedalling as hard as we could. The red-cap saw us when he turned the corner, sprang on a bicycle and came after us. We had the laugh on him as the Yanks say, for his flat tyres hampered his progress to such an extent that we soon shook him off. Avoiding the main road we followed devious lanes until we were quite lost, and did not get back before three in the morning. The cycles were abandoned a couple of miles from camp so that the owners would not be able to trace us. Unfortunately Roper had inquired for me and I had been reported missing. As far as I know we were never connected with the horse- or bicycle-stealing, but the little escapade cost me my stripes.

The C.S.M. seemed to take a peculiar delight in giving me the filthiest fatigues, and more than once I felt like assaulting him, in order to get away from the company; but I thought better of it, as I had no desire to spend a

couple of years in prison. I could have waylaid him at night, but that seemed cowardly, although it was what he deserved. A few weeks later some of the men got hold of him one night and threw him into a river ; he was somewhat more humane after that.

The night after I lost my stripes I was on sentry-go and we agreed to do four hours on at once, instead of two spells of two hours with a break between. I was on from midnight until four in the morning, and there was no shelter of any kind. The rain lashed in my face, soaked through my clothes and squelched in my boots. I looked at my watch a thousand times, and marvelled that the time could pass so slowly. In battle one had the excitement, there was no time to think of anything but action, killing to avoid being killed. But out in the middle of that field, there was nothing to take one's mind off the utter wretchedness of one's state, and I became embittered, pondering over the inanity of fate. A dull-witted man probably felt little boredom on sentry-go, but to the imaginative it was purgatory. I reflected over some passages I had been reading in Marcus Aurelius and tried to persuade myself that it would make no difference as soon as I was dead. It was easy to deceive myself with words, and pretend that comfort and peace were mere words, but the cold and wet were damned uncomfortable. I was tormented by visions of the past and dread of the future. There seemed no prospect of a speedy end to the slaughter, and I wondered if my end would be in a big battle or in some obscure trench during desultory shelling. Then my old fear of mutilation or insanity returned ; my nerves were in a bad state.

The weeks we spent in the grounds of that château are amongst my most unpleasant recollections of the war. When I think of that period I see a vast expanse of sodden muddy ground, wet tents, and disgruntled men, drilling, or doing all kinds of fatigues, from dawn to dusk, for soldiers must never be idle. The evenings were the worst time, for the tents were full of mud, and it was impossible to dry one's clothes. Occasionally we went up the line, carrying bombs, wiring, or digging, under the supervision of the engineers. One such expedition stands out in my mind.

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We had to dig a trench east of Souchez near Vimy Ridge. The Germans shelled it every night, and it was scarcely finished when we received news that it had been completely destroyed, and would have to be dug again. It was intended to bury a cable there, but owing to some extraordinary blunder the cable was not available when the trench was dug, and the second effort cost us a dozen men. We were taken to the spot in lorries which cleared off as fast as they could, as soon as we had taken our picks and shovels from them. The trench had to be six feet deep, and the C.S.M. had a stick with which he tested the depth. Jerry sent over every conceivable kind of shell, from huge things that were like express trains hurtling overhead, to little whizz-bangs that blew men to pieces before they could take shelter.

The French had lost a lot of men in that sector about two years before, and we dug up innumerable skeletons. Every time our picks struck something hard it was a skull or cluster of ribs. The dead had been buried fully dressed, and we had to pull at a coat or trousers to clear the ground for the spade. Our own dead were thrown into a big shell-hole when the job was done, and we marched back to the lorries over a duck-board track, laid on a sea of mud. The star shells enabled us to keep to the boards, but, when a shell dropped near, we had no option but to flounder in the mud. It was with relief that we left the danger zone and were able to smoke and scrape off some of the mud.

A few days later we went into action in front of Vimy Ridge. The Germans held all the high ground and pounded us at will. The ground behind us was strewn with French skeletons in faded blue uniforms; their remains were even in our parapet. Rumours were going round that a big attack was being prepared, and that the objectives would be the enemy lines from Lens to Arras. As I surveyed the ridge I realized how difficult it would be to take, for the enemy were very strongly entrenched, and we would have to charge uphill against masses of wire.

We lost the sergeant-major after a couple of days in the front line. He was a fearless man and laughed at those who ducked or fell flat when a shell dropped near. He stood near me when a whizz-bang hit the parapet and I

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bobbed down: "It's no good flopping down, my boy, if it's got your number on it'll get yer even if you dig down as deep as hell." An hour later a small shell burst near him and disembowelled him very neatly; he might have escaped by dropping flat. He was a peculiar man, strict, fair on the whole, yet merciless when the situation demanded sacrifices. I only once heard a private give him a jocular retort. While inspecting the trench he saw some excreta right in his path. Calling the sanitary orderly, he angrily demanded the name of the culprit whose deposit stared him in the face. Little Bowler, a chubby youth from Bolton, bent down, inspected the excreta, and gravely replied: "I can't see anybody's number on it, sir." That was the only time I saw Roper smile.

I liked Bowler. He was a good lad and sent all his pay home to help his widowed mother. He was buried next day by a *minnenwerfer* bomb that demolished several yards of trench. On one occasion when we were out at rest he and I went to swim in a canal. We dived in together and came up plastered with mud, surrounded by stink and dead fish. The Germans had poisoned the water and it had become excessively foul. To add to our discomfort, some peasant girls came along, and sat near our clothes. We were entirely naked and had to wait shivering in the pestilential waters. In spite of our shouts the females refused to move, so we became desperate, climbed out, and walked up to our clothing. The mud stuck and we had to go to a pond to get it off. It was a novel sensation, dressing in front of a group of hussies, but they must have been accustomed to it, for they didn't even blush, and offered the use of their bodies for a few francs.

It was with Bowler also that I had a curious adventure in Béthune. We obtained two days' leave to visit the town when in the neighbourhood, and arrived there one morning. The place was full of Portuguese, whom the Tommies called Pork and Beans, and a dirtier, more unkempt crowd I have never seen. Even a pacifist likes soldiers to be smart and clean, but those dark-skinned loungers took no pride in their appearance, and thought nothing of marching along out of step with their hands in their pockets. At first I



thought they were unemployed organ-grinders, their uniforms were so grotesque. There is a proverb in their language which says that rulers who order what is unjust, are disobeyed by their subjects even in what is just. Their commanders must have been most unjust, for I saw no obedience at all. The truth is that their hearts were not in the war; they were fighting for a foreign power and longing for their homes. When I started learning Portuguese after the war my teacher taught me:

*Nem todos os que estudam sao letrados  
Nem todos os que vao a guerra sao soldados,*

which means: "All who study are not learned, nor all who go to war soldiers," and I immediately thought of the rag-time soldiers who would as lief run as fight. I heard that their G.O.C., da Costa, was a fine soldier and in no way to blame for the poor showing of his men.

Bowler and I arrived in Béthune at eight in the morning, and had a satisfactory breakfast, the first for weeks. We then set out to explore, and spent some time drinking in a café near the market square. On the way to the station my pal happened to jostle a Pork and Beans military policeman, who insisted on arresting him. Bowler was inclined to resist, but I urged him to go quietly, telling him I would put things right. They had to pass through a narrow passage on the way to the prison and luckily it was deserted. I gave the dirty-faced policeman a dig in the back and told him to release my pal. He was drawing his baton when I hit him a blow on the point of the jaw that would have felled an ox. He collapsed and we ran, taking his stick as a souvenir. The trouble was that the trains would be watched as they were pretty certain we had come in by rail, so we walked about eight miles, and boarded a train at a village where a lot of soldiers were getting on and off.

On the same day that Bowler was killed, another man in my section, Anson, committed suicide by shooting himself with his rifle. He had been worried and morose for a couple of weeks, and confided to me that he had received a letter informing him that his wife was living with another man. Not without difficulty he obtained a few days' special leave

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and went home to investigate. Arriving at the house without warning, he was just in time to see his wife's lover disappearing over the garden wall, and in the dining-room was an illegitimate child crying in its cot. Anson's first impulse was to murder his wife and her child, but he was able to resist it, and simply gave instructions for the house and furniture to be sold. When he returned, he seemed to be unable to think of anything but the loss of his home and happiness. After three days of misery he put his rifle under his chin and blew a hole through the top of his head; he had pulled the trigger by a string tied to his boot.

I felt his death keenly, for we had become good pals. He had been a famous association football player and was a fine sportsman. One night he and I saved the life of the sergeant-major when an Irish private got drunk, and announced his intention of shooting the b—— whose delight was to give the privates hell. We didn't particularly like the C.S.M., but were not going to see him murdered in cold blood, for he was not nearly so bad as others whose commissions protected them. When the drunken Irishman started to stalk the S.M. with a loaded rifle, we thought it time to intervene, and overpowered the demented one before he could do any damage.

That son of Erin was a mad rascal. The son of a parson, he had studied in Dublin, and then went to the dogs when his father died and left him some money. After spending all his fortune he enlisted in the regular army and had been all over the world. He was a good fellow when sober, but once the drink got to his head he would commit murder. One night, before I lost my stripes, I had a jar of rum in my dug-out and Tiny, as we called him (because he stood six feet three inches), crawled into my den hoping to get at the rum. He was drunk, otherwise he would not have done it. I woke up suddenly and felt Paddy crawling over me. Luckily I had a torch and flashed it on him. He seized me by the throat and I was obliged in self-defence to shoot him through the body with my revolver. I reported him wounded in action and no one ever knew the truth about the matter. When I questioned Tiny about his wound, he said he remembered getting blind drunk and

after that his mind was a blank. He had a month in hospital and was none the worse for his escapade.

The winter passed slowly, short dismal days and dreary nights, periods of intense boredom punctuated with moments of furious action. Sometimes heavy rain-clouds drifted overhead all day and we were chilled to the bone, crouching round some brazier with a fire that would not have warmed a rat. The trenches in that sector were in a very bad state, and, as soon as we built them up, Jerry knocked them down, so that usually we had no parapet. The cooks kept a long way off and the food was always cold. The tea as usual tasted of petrol and chloride of lime. Our artillery made constant efforts to silence the *minnenwerfers*, but they seemed as bold as ever after the severest strafe, and made life in our front line hell indeed. We spent most of our time running to avoid the enormous bombs that obliterated a whole bay.

The night before we were to be relieved, Jerry started a most intense bombardment with high-velocity guns. The guns were not far away, for we could distinctly hear the noise of discharge. The shells took about five seconds to reach us, and we cowered in our holes as they burst in front or behind. There were so many that we knew we were bound to be hit before long, and we lay shivering with fright. In the middle of the uproar there was a cry for stretcher-bearers and I went out to see if I could be of any help. The ration carriers had been hit, and there was a bloody heap of men and food. No one else ventured out, for the air was full of flying metal, and I only came out because it seemed as well to be hit in the open as to be buried. The wounded men were beyond help. One of them gripped my arm and muttered something, but his words were unintelligible. Blood poured from his belly and he died while I held him.

I was almost frantic with funk, when I saw a jar of rum, the only thing that was not smashed. To grab it and return to the dug-out was the work of a few seconds, and it did not take us long to get blind drunk. Then we lay singing and cursing, while the pounding of the shells put the candle out every time we lit it. In the middle of a

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ribald song I felt a stone hit me on the head. I was tossed in the air, came down with a crash, and found myself buried under a mass of sand-bags, iron girders, and wooden props. We were in utter darkness, I felt almost suffocated, and the weight of debris on my body and legs was unbearable; the pain made me faint.

When I recovered consciousness I heard one of my companions groaning, but the others were silent. After many hours we were dug out, and I found I was the only survivor, the groaning man having bled to death. His legs were crushed and a shell splinter was embedded in his cranium. The other five were mutilated beyond description. The shell had come through the roof, buried itself in the floor, and we were literally blown up, before being buried under the demolished shelter. Only the previous day we had strengthened the roof with big stones and sacks of earth. I was covered with cuts and bruises, my whole body ached, and I was afraid that serious internal damage had been done. The least movement made me groan, and I had to go to hospital for a couple of weeks, where they discovered there was nothing much the matter, and before long I was back with the company again.

The number of captive balloons in the sector increased greatly, and the enemy airmen worked overtime trying to bring them down; sometimes they were successful. It was exciting to watch the plane coming nearer, in spite of concentrated fire from anti-aircraft guns, machine-guns, and rifles. When it was seen that the balloon was in danger, desperate efforts were made to haul it in, but often the daring aviator got there first and sent it down in flames. One evening the German was successful, but was badly hit, and, losing height, tried to scrape home like a wounded bird; we got him as he came low over the trench, and he plunged in flames just behind his lines.

Great dumps of shells were being formed near the field guns and large stocks were arriving for the trench mortars; it was evident that the forthcoming attack was to be on a big scale. We spent several weeks rehearsing the show and doing fatigues in the line, usually furnishing carrying parties at night. I had not seen such preparations since

the Somme, and for four nights we worked helping to fix gas projectors for throwing drums of the deadly stuff.

The company was composed mainly of men who had never been in a big attack, and they were rather despised by the veterans, who regarded themselves as superior because they had bled at Ypres or on the Somme. The conscripts were beginning to arrive and were viewed with a jaundiced eye. Most of them were poor specimens, but only one was really objectionable. He had been a conchy until convicted of assault and ordered to join up. The magistrate told him he was not a pacifist but clearly a believer in retaliation. He was a most unwholesome person, and persisted in airing his views, which soon got him into trouble. The men who had volunteered at the beginning felt they had a right to curse the whole business, but a conchy who had sheltered at home for over two years, while better men were getting killed, was asking for trouble when he started laying down the law. He was usually told to put a bloody sock in it and muck off.

The land had been so scarred that not a blade of grass was to be seen near the trenches, and for a couple of miles back everything had been destroyed. One day I was rummaging in a ruined garden when I found a bulb ready to sprout; I sent it home with a pal going on leave, and in due course it produced a beautiful tulip:

"Yes, while on earth a thousand discords ring,  
Man's senseless uproar mingling with his toil,  
Still do thy quiet ministers move on,  
Their glorious tasks in silence perfecting;  
Still working, blaming still our vain turmoil,  
Labourers that shall not fail, when man is gone."

## CHAPTER XXI

WE returned to the line and heard that the attack was fixed for April the ninth. Our guns were giving Jerry a bad time, and we prayed that the wire would be properly cut.

The hole in which I found myself with a dozen men was as foul a place as one could well imagine. Water ran into it from the trench outside and the floor was a mixture of mud, paper, rags, cigarette-ends and spit. I was fortunate in having a stretcher for a bed, but the others slept in the filth, over which they spread a layer of sand-bags every night. When not on duty we were at the eternal card-playing; when money was not to be had we played for cigarettes and sometimes we were reduced to matches. Often when fags were scarce we took a suck each and passed the remainder on.

The rain drizzled down regularly every day, and we slithered and fell while working at night; usually when we came in from night work we were covered with brown mud and too tired to scrape it off. A good deal of our spare time was spent trying to chew hard biscuits, for we were always hungry. Each time the rations came up we pulled the lids off the dixies, and howled with rage at the insufficient quantity and poor quality of the fare. It was a difficult task dividing up such rations among hungry men, who cursed like fury when they thought they hadn't enough. "They'll be feeding us on canary seed next, I'm b——d if they won't," cried one man, "I got better bloody skilly in quod. Who wouldn't be a muckin' soldier?"

One day I had to accompany an officer who went visiting the artillery batteries a mile or so in our rear. While he was in the mess I wandered about, and was able to steal several packets of tallow candles. Then I paid a visit to

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the officers' cook-house, where I obtained a sackful of provisions, including bread, condensed milk, cheese, and a big chunk of meat. The cook was sleeping behind his shack, and the others were on a gas-helmet parade, so the coast was clear. With great stealth I carried my burden to a hedge and buried it there, making a hole with a shovel lying near.

My officer was a long time in the mess, but after an hour he came out with the R.F.A. officers and went to inspect their guns. Slipping into the mess I poured out a big glass of whisky and gulped it down so fast that it nearly choked me. It was one of the drinks of which the memory will never fade. I had been tired, dry and despondent; that glass of whisky made me forget all my troubles; the world seemed brighter and my aches and pains had disappeared.

When my officer returned I kept a good distance from him so that he might not smell my breath. To my joy he told me I would have to take another message to the artillery in the evening. I had been wondering how I would get the buried grub, for it was impossible to leave the trench without orders. It was dark when I reached the battery, delivered the message, and slipped away to the hedge. The work of extracting the sack of provisions did not take long, and, avoiding the road, I set out for the trench. When I got back to the dug-out my companions could hardly believe their eyes. We ate until we were ready to split, and then lay back picking our teeth like dukes.

A few days later we were hungry again, so I took the tallow candles from my haversack, melted them in a large tin with a heap of biscuits, and poured in a stolen tin of jam. The compound was devoured with incredible relish. The following day I received a box of fish from home. The smell emanating from the box was anything but pleasant, and when I examined the postmark I saw that the parcel had taken ten days to reach me. When I opened it the fish were covered with maggots. Before my pals returned from a job they were on, I fried the Scotch haddocks and everybody enjoyed them.

Next night one man produced a piece of cold bacon from his mess-tin and offered me a bit. It went down well with

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a crust, and although I had to spit out some grit, I shall remember that bit of cold bacon when the memory of sumptuous meals will have faded from my mind.

One lad lamented that before enlisting he was faddy about his food and often turned up his nose at a good dinner. "Never again will I leave any food on my plate," he vowed. "I feel so hungry I could eat a mangy pup." We discussed plum pudding and roast beef until our mouths watered and someone burst into song:

"O fer a roly poly  
Like muvver used ter mike.  
Roly poly, treacle duff,  
Roly poly, that's the stuff,  
An' when ah fink abaht it  
It mikes me tummy aike.  
O fer a roly poly  
Like muvver used ter mike."

"O shut yer bleedin' trap," growled a voice in a dark corner, "d'yer want Fritz ter start a bloody strafe?"

I was on patrol that night, and as I crawled about all my old terrors returned. I literally trembled with fear, and every shot made my heart miss a beat. The corporal was in a blue funk and made me go to investigate a German post quite near the enemy wire. I knew the N.C.O. was a married man with several children, so said nothing, although the officer told him he had to go and see the spot for himself. Each time my foot kicked a tin or anything that rattled I lay still, pressed to the earth, hoping Jerry had not heard. Every post seemed a man, and I caught myself looking round all the time, thinking someone was going to shoot or stab me in the back; that was a bad sign. To make my fears worse a Véry light suddenly dropped within a foot of me, and spluttered while I felt the heat, afraid to make the least movement lest Jerry should notice me.

Continuing my crawl I came upon dead men, mostly English, lying just as they had fallen. Rain and rats had made a ghastly mess of them. A particularly bright light showed me that I was in the middle of half-eaten skeletons, and an old sap was full of them.

When I reached the German post I heard voices coming



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from it, and lobbed a couple of bombs right in the middle of it; my nerves were too frayed to investigate further, so I crawled back and reported that it was occupied. On the return journey I cut my hand on a sharp bone sticking up from a smashed skeleton. For a long time the wound would not heal, it festered and was very painful. I was worried, fearing blood poisoning. Sometimes at night I was tempted to rub some dirt in it to get to Blighty, but the fear of losing the limb restrained me. Although I have never had much faith in popular remedies, I found a well-known preparation that soothed the inflammation, reduced the swelling, and cured the festering.

A man named Sands was sitting in the corner of the dug-out. His age was about forty and he was one of the ugliest fellows I've ever seen, short, thick-set and with a pock-marked face. When in a good mood he was full of fun, but sometimes, especially when under the influence of rum, he showed he had a fiendish temper. He had been in the navy, and deserted in America, where he lived for many years, picking up a Yankee accent. Sands asked me how to spell "enamour," and on being questioned admitted he was writing a love letter. We all roared with laughter; the idea of anyone being in love with Sands was too much for our imaginations. "What th' 'ell are yer laughin' at?" he demanded; "can't I write to a tart, saine as anyone else? All of you b——s 'ud like any one o' my girls, I'm tellin' yer." He produced a bundle of photographs and letters which were passed round for inspection. The secret came out when Sands told us that, a few weeks before, he had been on fatigues opening ammunition boxes, and had found a slip inside each box from the girl who packed it. Each slip invited the soldier boy who opened the box to correspond (if single) with the sender, whose name and address were given. Sands had been married for many years and had even, on his own confession, been in prison for failing to support his wife. In spite of that he wrote to a large number of girls, describing himself as young, tall, handsome and unattached. We began to understand why the rascal had been of late receiving so many letters and parcels. He was utterly shameless, and read aloud the

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amorous declarations of the trusting females, who, after exchanging two or three letters with the hero at the front, were longing to marry him.

I crawled out of the dug-out and looked up at the sky. It was black with rain clouds and a party of men walking past made the mud squelch. Dark figures were silhouetted as star shells went up and rats scurried past my feet. A body lay on a stretcher awaiting burial, the heavy muddy boots dangling pitifully over the end of the canvas. I bent down and uncovered the face, it was that of a recruit who was having his first spell in the line. A lance-corporal who was standing near crept into a hole and lit a cigarette: "Bloody funny 'ow that kid was killed," he confided. "'E was 'it in the 'and by a splinter and got a lovely blighty. 'E was larfin' an' 'avin' it dressed when a bomb fell at 'is feet an' didn't 'arf make a mess o' 'is guts."

I noticed a tin of creosote and imagined it would be a good thing for killing lice. It was used for sanitary purposes and had a pungent odour that was not unpleasant. I poured about half a pint into a jam tin and returned to the dug-out. A few of my mates thought the idea sound, and we all pulled down our trousers to get at the hairy parts. We soaked bits of rag in the dark liquid and applied it, also to the seams of our trousers, which were white with lice. In a couple of minutes we were howling with agony, for the creosote should have been mixed with about fifty times as much water. Cold tea reduced the burning, but we got no sleep, and sat up smoking and cursing, and applying vaseline to the burnt parts.

A man named Wilson had a curious hobby, collecting false teeth from the dead. His haversack contained a number of plates, some containing gold or platinum, and he hoped to sell them when he got leave. Most of us joked about it, but one man was very indignant. "If you steal my bloody teeth when I'm bowled over I'll come and haunt you, b——d if I won't," he cried. The speaker had been chucker-out in pubs, tall and strong, with a battered face. He had acted as sparring partner to many famous boxers, and had all the badges of his profession, flat nose, split lip and enlarged ears.

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"Well, what's the good of teeth to a dead man?" demanded Wilson in an aggrieved voice. "It's a shame to bury good money."

"Yes, but it don't seem proper like to take things from a dead un," interpolated a voice from the darkness, "unless you send 'em to 'is people, that is."

"But what the 'ell can their people do with 'em?" interposed the collector. "Stick 'em in a bloody drawer, mos' like, an' forget all about 'em."

"It seems to me to be a kind of sacrilege, robbing the dead, an' I'm sure no good will come of it," remarked a fat middle-aged man whose red face suggested a butcher, although strange to relate he had been a grave-digger before enlisting. His name was Tyler and his temperament was most equable. He never said much, but always in the dug-out smoked a short, thick, black pipe, and ejected black saliva towards the entrance from time to time; we usually put our hands on it when crawling in and out. "I remember a feller wot used to pinch wreaths off the graves, an' 'e fell over one night when drunk an' died before mornin'. That shows 'e wor punished, don't it?" demanded Tyler. "Besides," he continued, "sacrilege always brings bad luck."

"You fellers get on my bleedin' nerves like a lot of old women," vociferated the other. He was angry and went out into the trench.

Next night we came out of the trenches and had to march fifteen miles to a place further north. Rain started and I could feel it was going to last for hours. Some fool gave the order that greatcoats were to be worn, although rubber sheets were the only things that were of any use in such a torrential downpour. After an hour our coats were soaked and weighed us down like lead. When the rain stopped for a while the sodden things flopped about us and made us sweat like hogs. Steam rose from the column and we bent forward to ease the weight of the packs. I had a heavy German fuse in my pack and it made a sore place on my back. It was dumped at the first halt, as in a long march every ounce tells. We opened our tunics and shirts at the neck and the steam rose from our hairy chests like smoke from chimneys. When we stopped for a rest some of the

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men remained standing but most of us sat at the side of the road in the mud and wet.

We reached our destination at dawn, and were paraded in a field for inspection. An officer, who must have been a general, for he had a red band round his cap, rode up and down followed by his staff. He cursed the colonel and said we were the most unkempt crowd he had ever seen. Imagine an inspection after six hours' marching in the rain! We were naturally covered with mud and soaking wet, haggard and dishevelled. If the men could have got hold of that brass hat on a dark night he wouldn't have lasted very long. "The son of a bitch," muttered someone, "isn't it enough to be 'umped an' bumped and b——d about without a swine like that sitting on 'is 'orse an' cursing at us at the end of a bloody fifteen-mile slog in the rain?"

I was in the front rank and saw the general clearly. He was a big fat lout with a red pimply face, and he glowered at us as if we were convicts. His staff was composed of young handsome blades who had wangled their jobs owing to influence at the War Office or in the Cabinet. At one time we thought such jobs were given for distinguished service, but we were gradually disillusioned.

We had to drill all day in the rain as a punishment for slackness, and when night came on were dismissed, soaked, and sick of the whole business. Some of us tried to get into the farm kitchen, but the woman would have none of it, as we were too muddy and her kitchen was clean. She was one of the most disagreeable females I have ever met. There were plenty of her kind in France and Belgium. They hated us because we were lodged in their barns and sheds. Occasionally damage was done, so I suppose they were not entirely to blame, but if they had ever been condemned to lie all night on wet straw in soaking garments, I think they would have been more considerate. The wind came through the cracks, for we had no paper to stop them up with. We were about twenty in a tiny barn, and with the door shut the air was most foul in spite of the draughts, and our wet dirty bodies gave off a vile odour. One or two of the men were coughing. Some stripped and lay naked in the straw, but they soon had to put their sodden garments

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on again, for the straw was cold and the rain dripping through the roof had soaked it.

After trying to sleep I gave it up as a bad job, and asked the man next to me if he would come and seek a place where we could dry our clothes. My neighbour was named Ryan, and had roamed all over the world. He was short and slim but very wiry. His face was brown and bony; he had roughed it in many lands, but even he could not sleep in cold wet clothes. We got up quietly and left the farm. It was still early in spite of the darkness, and we avoided the road for fear of military police.

Just over the crest of a little hill was a cottage with a light in the window; at least a light was visible through the cracks, for the window was covered with boards. We knocked at the door and a youngish woman opened it. She was about thirty and had a pleasant open face. We went in and told her what we wanted. She said she had very little wood, but that if we could find some we were welcome to her fire. She seemed to be speaking the truth, so we went in search of fuel, and stole a number of boxes from behind a dump. On returning to the cottage we soon had a roaring fire, and as the woman made no attempt to retire I said: "*Est-ce que madame va rester ici, car nous allons nous déshabiller?*" She replied with a laugh: "*Qu'est-ce que cela me fait? Ne vous en faites pas, allez-y,*" and we undressed in front of her. The room was hot and great flames shot out from the hearth. We sat naked, chatting, while the woman made coffee. Our clothes steamed and dried beautifully.

Instead of going up the line in the sector to which we had marched, we heard that we had to march back to where we started from. It was no use cursing; we marched in silence, thinking of the coming attack on the Ridge, which we had hoped to dodge. Two men near me discussed the eternal theme, the probable duration of the war and the *bon* time they intended having when peace came again. Little did they realize that the war had to be paid for, and that widespread suffering would result after such a period of massacre and destruction. Although we were loth to admit it, most of us feared we would never see the end of

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the business ; that was evident from sundry chance remarks and a furtive look that came into our eyes occasionally. It was amazing how we reacted, however, and put the future out of our minds. A tot of rum, a game of cards, a lascivious story, a stupid quarrel, all those things kept us from brooding over what fate had in store.

We went back into the line where we left it, and the days passed slowly and uneventfully. When I look back at those days I remember them as boring in the extreme with moments of intense fear. At times an empty shell-case was struck with a piece of iron to give warning of a gas attack, and we had the usual casualties from shells, trench-mortar bombs, and bullets. A few days before the big attack we heard tapping under the dug-out, and an engineer officer came and listened attentively ; he confirmed our fears that it was mining and we were all scattered. The Germans were mining under our trench, and we knew what that meant. Those who had seen mines go up, like the one in Sausage Valley on the Somme, did not require much imagination to make them experience intense fear. It meant that if the mine went off while we were in the trench not a man would be left, and where the trench had been there would be nothing but a huge gaping crater.

We were informed that our miners were at work under the German lines and would probably finish first, so that we had nothing to fear. We realized that that was simply a tale to cheer us up, and we went about like condemned men. There is a description in the works of Charles Darwin which illustrates what we were like one night in the dug-out when the noises stopped, and we expected to go sky-high every minute. I thought of a German fixing a fuse that would blow up tons of explosive, and uncontrollable fear took possession of us all. "The eyes and mouth are widely opened, and the eyebrows raised. The frightened man at first stands like a statue, motionless and breathless, or crouches down as if instinctively to escape observation. The heart beats quickly and violently, so that it palpitates or knocks against the ribs . . . the skin becomes pale, as during incipient faintness . . . perspiration exudes from it. This exudation is all the more remarkable, as the surface

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is then cold, and hence the term 'a cold sweat'; . . . the hairs also on the skin stand erect, and the superficial muscles shiver. In connection with the disturbed action of the heart, the breathing is hurried . . . the mouth becomes dry . . . all the muscles tremble . . . from this cause and the dryness of the mouth, the voice becomes husky or indistinct, or may altogether fail . . . as fear increases into an agony of terror, we behold, as under all violent emotions, diversified results. The heart beats wildly, or may fail to act, and faintness ensues; there is a death-like pallor; the breathing is laboured; the wings of the nostrils are widely dilated. . . . The uncovered and protruding eyeballs are fixed on the object of terror, or they may roll restlessly from side to side. . . . The hands are alternately clenched and opened . . . there is a sudden and uncontrollable tendency to headlong flight."

We crawled out into the trench and shivered there, until the heavy shelling drove us into the dug-out again. When the shelling ceased we listened, and, to our unspeakable joy, heard the tapping once more. It was a reprieve and we laughed as if all danger were past. Next night we were relieved, and a few hours later the mine went off, wiping out a whole company. We returned eight days later and saw that Jerry had pushed forward slightly his front line and was holding the crater.

Slowly but surely the great day dawned, and we stood tense and pale, ready to go over the top once more. For days our guns had been plastering the German lines with shells of every calibre, and on the morning of the attack the drum-fire was perfectly hellish. Jerry replied and we were in an inferno of flying clods, whizzing metal, and terrific explosions. Hill stood on my left and Tyler on my right. We were white and shivering. A shell blew the grave-digger to pieces and his brains hit me in the face while his blood gave me a shower bath. The blast of the explosion threw me to the floor, where I lay stunned and cowed. Bits of Tyler were lying near me and his pulverized head was touching my feet. The thud of the guns was like an army of giants pounding the ground; I was crazy with terror and my limbs twitched convulsively as I struggled

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to my feet. It was as if the earth were coming to pieces, whirling into fragments. Thick smoke drifted over the battle-field and the hellish bursts of shrapnel just over our heads made us crouch. Hill was sobbing: "O Christ, will it never stop? I'm going bloody mad . . . O God! Stop them guns . . . I must run away . . . I can't stand it. . . . O Jesus, have mercy on me. . . ."

I found out after his death that he was a Roman Catholic. It was easy to see that he was going mad; he shrieked and screamed like a demented person. Then I realized he was indeed demented, for he flung down his rifle and ran. The company commander shot him dead with his revolver, fearing a stampede.

Corporal Acres was smashed up by a bomb and his bloody remains lay in the trench. The trunk was more or less intact, but the legs were severed and the head flattened. The clothing was torn off in places and his belly, muddy and bloody, looked horrible. I turned my eyes away and saw Tyler's buttocks, also bare and bloody.

The call for stretcher-bearers came frequently but they were all busy; many of the wounded lay groaning and sobbing in the filth. Our barrage lifted at 5.30 a.m. and we climbed over, slipping and cursing as usual. Snow and sleet beat in our faces, but that was a blessing in disguise, for we were on top of Jerry before he saw us properly. The wire was well cut and we were in his trenches before he expected us. A few sentries showed fight and were at once shot and stabbed. The survivors came up from dug-outs, pale, muddy, and thoroughly demoralized. They held their hands high above their heads and were pathetically anxious to carry our wounded. As usual some of our fellows kicked and struck them, others pricked them with bayonets. There was one fool in the company who had lost a brother and who swore he would shoot every prisoner he could get hold of. Snarler Wilson was going to throw a bomb at a group of prisoners standing with their hands up, but desisted when two or three of us called him a bloody coward and threatened to blow his brains out if he killed defenceless men.

By noon we had attained our objectives, got our machine-



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guns into action, and felt safe for the time being. The enemy dug-outs in that sector were tremendous things, often thirty feet deep and well timbered. At the bottom of each shaft were two or three rooms, well fitted up and comfortable. Some had ventilators and were far superior to anything we had. Of course such deep shelters have drawbacks. Troops in them are apt to lose their nerve and funk coming out; on the other hand they save countless lives and enable men to sleep soundly, knowing that it is practically impossible for a shell to reach them.

We explored some of the deepest shelters; they were nearly full of dead and dying. The air was heavy with the smell of iodine and corruption. Blood was splashed on the walls and ran down the steps. The rooms at the bottom of the stairs were shambles, the dead lay on top of each other, having been thrown down during the battle. I searched them for souvenirs and drew back in horror when a horribly mutilated body moved slightly. The eyes opened and I saw that the wretch was alive. I hadn't the heart to shoot him until he rolled over and groaned pitifully; then I put a bullet through the back of his head to end his agony. A shell or bomb must have burst near him, for he was covered with blood and the chest was in shreds; the limbs were broken and shapeless.

I went into a smaller room at the side, and saw an officer lying dead on a wire bed. A terrible wound stretched across his face; both eyes were destroyed, the nose smashed, and the congealed blood had soaked into his thick moustaches. One hand was missing and there was a wound in the thigh. I had got so familiar with the sight of mutilated corpses, that I at once commenced to search the room and was rewarded. I found cigars, cigarettes, and a bottle of wine. We had indeed been forbidden to touch such things, but I was in no mood for restrictions. The bottle of wine was drained in a few gulps and put new life into me. A loaf of black bread soon disappeared also and I shared the smokes with my companions.

We were now on the crest of a ridge, and, looking to the west, were able to see how Jerry had dominated our positions. The marvel was that any of us were allowed to

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live in such holes under his direct observation. At the day's end we were standing ankle-deep in watery mud surrounded by broken wire, rifles, pieces of equipment, and all the usual wreckage of a battle-field.

"What a bloody life!" growled a man near me. "Now we wait until Fritz comes back an' knocks hell out of us."

We smoked and tried to scrape off some of the mud and filth. It was cold and I was wet through, having fallen into a hole full of water while crossing No-Man's Land. A big shell had come roaring towards me, and in utter terror I flung myself into the water. The shell burst a few yards away, blew in the sides of my water-filled refuge, and almost buried me alive.

One often reads highfalutin accounts of philosophic meditations on the battle-field. For my part I lived like a brute. My mind was numbed and incapable of any thought, beyond brooding over the fiendish discomforts that we had to endure. As far as I can recollect them my thoughts on that memorable evening were not very different from those of other times. The utter futility of war was ever present in my mind. Then I wondered how long it would be before we got a good meal and a decent sleep. My patriotism had evaporated, for I had more respect for the men we were fighting than for the millions of munition workers and profiteers in England, who were sucking the nation's blood while the troops sacrificed everything. We heard rumours of strikes and constant demands for higher pay. Such things made us bitter and we would cheerfully have shot a few of the malcontents as an example to the others. I wondered if I would ever have a home of my own in which peace and simplicity would reign. Then I cursed myself for having joined a fighting regiment while others were tucked away in cushy billets at the base.

There seemed no end to it all. If one could only count the days and say: "Only two hundred more or less"; but the interminable slaughter and nerve strain was more than I could bear. I had broken a tooth on a hard biscuit and it ached like hell. I thought of my people, of Jean, of all that might have been, and started wondering if I couldn't sham illness or wound myself in some way, so as

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to get away to a clean white bed and rest. I longed for peace and quietness with a fierce longing; all my being rebelled against the killing and brutality, for I had lost faith in the justice of the cause for which I was fighting. Hatred was the business of the civilian.

Jack Thompson, a man of forty, came to me with some food and we got busy. I felt ashamed at having consumed the loaf without sharing, but I had been so desperately hungry that the voice of conscience was stifled. While we were eating Jack asked me if I would do him a favour. I said I would if it were possible. He thereupon explained in a whisper that his nerves had gone and that he could stick it no longer. Therefore he asked me to put a bullet into him so that he could get away down the line. I listened to his tale of woe, sick wife and six little ones, no one to look after his small holding, and so on. The idea was hateful, but, on the other hand, if his nerve had really gone, he would be shot for cowardice; perhaps I could save him from that. I reflected that a man with six kids had no business in the front line while single men were many miles in the rear. After a long silence I said to Jack: "Go down into the dug-out at the end of the communication trench and I will follow."

Thompson got up and walked away. He was a short man without a single distinguishing feature, except perhaps his black drooping moustaches. His shoulders were narrow and drooping, his mien dejected. The men often teased him and called him "Dismal Jack," but I wonder how many of them would have been cheerful with a sick wife, six children and debts. The dug-out to which we went was unoccupied, as part of the entrance had been blown in, and the dead had not been removed. We slithered on the thick pools of blood and walked on the dead at the bottom. I had explored the place in the afternoon, and knew there was a tunnel leading off from the main room. I did not want the rifle shot to be heard.

When we reached a spot in the gallery, about thirty yards from the bottom of the stairs, a shot rang out, and poor old Jack dropped dead. I fired at the spot where the flash came from, and the noise reverberated all through the

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hollow chambers. My nerves were badly shaken, so I took a Mills bomb from my pocket, pulled out the pin, and threw it at where I supposed the enemy marksman to be. I heard groans but thought it might be a ruse. After some thought I decided to put it to the test, and, hiding down behind some dead, I held my torch high above my head and flashed it towards the corner where Jerry seemed to be. Immediately another shot rang out but missed, and I had the satisfaction of seeing a German officer lying about ten yards away, and firing with a revolver. I thought of crawling away but was afraid he would get me before I reached the exit.

Then I remembered that Jack had a torch in his pocket and that gave me an idea. Shielding it, I found it was still in working order, so, pushing the button which made it keep glowing, I threw it slightly beyond the German. Luckily it fell on some sacks and remained glowing. The Prussian officer tried to reach it, but while he was doing so I shot him through the head and put two more into his body to make sure. When I examined him I found he had lost a leg and had many other wounds. Why he fired at us I shall never know, unless it was the idea that he was helping his country by killing those who came to explore the tunnel. He was probably a brave man. The head was striking, with stiff fair hair. The expression was peaceful, and I noticed particularly the straight nose and firm chin. When I took his papers from his pocket I found that he was Baron Max von Riezenstein. Letters indicated that he belonged to an old Prussian military family, and therefore probably thought it disgraceful to fall into the hands of the enemy, even wounded, if he could still do some damage.

One determined attempt was made to dislodge us from our new positions, but we repulsed it and at midnight were relieved. All the officers in my company had been killed and most of my platoon. There were seven survivors, although the other platoons had not suffered so heavily. Once more I was offered promotion and categorically refused; I'd had enough. The new company commander, Captain Oliver, was a quiet, reserved man.

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He read good books and was something of a scholar. One day he lost a book and I found it in the mud. It was a copy of the oldest extant drama of the world, "The Persians" of Æschylus, in the original. I handed it to him and he told me to see him in his hut in half an hour. When I went to him he was alone, and told me to sit on one of the boxes they used as chairs. Then he said :

"I understand you refuse promotion. Why?"

"Because, sir, I've had enough. Having served so long in the ranks I may as well see the war out—if I'm so fortunate—as a private."

"But," he replied, "it's up to every man to serve to the best of his ability, and good officers are extremely scarce. A private soldier is an automaton. You appear to have certain qualities, your record proves it, which would make you an efficient officer. As a private any qualities of leadership you may have stagnate. Good officers are rare, rarer than you probably think. Before this bloody business is over they will be rarer still. You see, young subalterns just out from home, after a short course at a cadet school, are often fine fellows, brave and even reckless, but they know little or nothing about leadership. Usually they lack personality, and the men who have been through the mill have but little confidence in them. How can a boy of eighteen or nineteen have the tact and resolution necessary to lead men successfully? The best of them learn their trade by painful groping and experimenting. If I had my way no one would be able to become an officer until he had proved himself in the field as a private and N.C.O."

Captain Oliver then asked me about my studies and told me that he was lecturer in Greek in a Scottish university. I liked him for his strength of character and his candour. He had no need to curse and bully the men; they respected him without that. I asked permission to think over the matter and was dismissed.

We went back to the park three or four miles west of Souchez, and drilled in the mud, while suffering inspections *ad nauseam*. Those inspections were a hateful business; I loathed them. Perhaps they were necessary, but it

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seemed to me they were overdone. A soldier is not less efficient because of a speck of dust on a button or a trace of mud on a puttee. At one time we blackened the buttons and badges, but some wisacre put a stop to that. The powers that were lacked imagination. They failed to realize how men loathed petty tyranny. It was assumed that unless the men were eternally polishing they would get slack. Long before the officers were up, an upstart of a sergeant-major, who, before the war, was standing outside a cinema, had us out on parade, shouting and swearing at us as if we were convicts in some penitentiary. "Come on, you bloody swine, I'll sweat the beer out of yer. The laziest lot of b——s I've ever seen in uniform. Call yourselves soldiers? Bloody loafers, that's what you are." He roared like a lion, turned purple and glowered. One man resented the treatment and said: "Excuse me, I'm not a dog." The C.S.M. rushed at him, and was going to dig him in the chest with his stick, when the man let fly and knocked him flat with a murderous right swing to the jaw.

The offender (I mean the private of course) was at once placed under arrest. When the trial came off later in the day two or three N.C.O.s gave evidence for the sergeant-major, but the private said he wished to call the whole company, and a number of us were selected by Captain Oliver to give our accounts of the affair. We described what had happened, and some of the witnesses added that they were so accustomed to being cursed and vilified, that they took no notice of it, but the new man had been on some island in the South Seas, and had waited over two years for a ship to take him to England. He was tall, broad-shouldered, and brown of face; one glance was enough to tell anyone with average sense that he would put up with no bullying. Oliver was obviously angry with the C.S.M., but discipline had to be maintained, and the private was remanded for a court-martial as he refused to accept summary jurisdiction.

One night we had to go up the line with Mills bombs in sacks. It was a long march, about ten miles altogether, and the last one was hell. The long communication trench

was flooded, and the narrow duck-board was covered with mud. Those who slipped off it sank up to the waist; we pulled one man out when only his head was visible. Jerry was shelling and we came on a heap of wounded. As they lifted one, they saw he was dead, and threw him over the top of the trench. Two bearers coming down the trench fell, and threw their burden on the boards. Then one of them bent down and said to his pal: "'Ere, Bill, this b——'s kicked the bucket; no good carrying 'im any further." So that corpse was also heaved over the top.

We lost our way and in some extraordinary manner wandered into some trenches where a relief was taking place. Caught between the troops going out and those coming in, we had absolute hell. Most of us were trampled in the mud, and I thought one officer was going to blow our brains out. He had been drinking and came along waving his revolver. It was three in the morning before we completed our job and then we had the ten miles march back. We had walked over an old latrine that had not been filled in and so were covered with excreta up to the knees. The smell was almost unbearable, but we were too tired to scrape it off. More than once I found myself sleeping on my feet, and on one such occasion I stumbled into a shell-hole before I awoke. Try as I would I could not keep my eyes open, and to this day I have no recollection of reaching the tent at dawn.

Next night it was fatigues again; trench-mortar bombs from Souchez to the front line on the ridge. It was extremely hard work, and soon we were soaked with sweat and rain. The country round about was stark in its desolation, ruined villages, broken trees, myriads of shell-holes full of water, and the ubiquitous mud a foot deep on the road. A battery of field guns near the road was covered with camouflage, wire netting covered with imitation leaves and grass. The flames from the gun mouths set the overhanging painted grass on fire, and soon there was a glorious blaze. Large quantities of shells and charges were stacked behind the guns, and for a time it looked as if the flames would reach them. The gunners had to keep on firing and we put out the blaze. Sparks and flaming tufts of

grass fell on us while we pulled at the coverings. The picture of that battery firing away, lit up by the conflagration, will never grow dim in my mind's eye. We were like devils in hell, black and fierce, cursing quietly every time our hands or faces were burnt.

Then the Germans spotted the glow in the sky, and, probably remembering the presence of a battery at that spot, proceeded to give us a lesson in sharpshooting. The bursting shells added to the din, and great red flashes slashed the darkness. There was a direct hit on the right-hand gun and, when the smoke cleared, I saw the crew lying dead round the piece. It was discovered that the gas shells stored behind the battery had been hit also, and the order was passed round to put on gas-helmets. I was in a state of terror for I had lost my mask in the excitement, having dumped it with one or two other things so as to be better able to fight the flames. I rushed about like a scared rabbit and with animal-like satisfaction found a satchel complete on the ground near the dead. I put it on hurriedly and worked getting the wounded away. Most of my companions were *hors de combat*, and a number had ghastly wounds.

Climbing up on a gun pit to clear off some of the still burning sacking, I tore the side of my mask, and was again in a fit of terror. Jumping down I rushed to a man on a stretcher and pulled off his mask. He was badly hit and his side was covered with blood. Half of his left arm was missing and I saw he could not live long, so argued that a sound man had more need of a mask than a dying one. A few minutes later I found another mask on a dead man, and took it to the wounded fellow I had robbed, but he too had ceased to suffer. When morning dawned the scene was lugubrious in the extreme. The guns had been smashed and overturned, the ground was pitted with big holes; sand-bags, pieces of bodies, equipment, and scattered shells, were strewn all over the scene of the fire. All my companions had disappeared; most of them were dead or wounded, but a few had survived and I looked round for them. I gave up the search when rain started, and came to the conclusion that they had slipped off home.



I was walking down the road, as disreputable a figure as one could well imagine, when Captain Oliver came along on a horse. He dismounted and told me to hold it until he returned. His last words to me were: "Don't move from here until I return."

My luck was indeed out, for I was tired, hungry and wet. After the night's toil and excitement I had been looking forward to a drink of hot tea, some grub and a sleep, but it was not to be. The rain increased and soon was driving in sheets. It ran down my neck, soaked my shirt and came out of the lace-holes of my boots. I had no coat or ground sheet, and could not have been wetter if I had been stark naked. The horse was shy and spirited. Whenever a shell dropped anywhere near, it pranced and snorted, and I had my work cut out to hang on to the maddened brute. The rain stung it too, and it tried all the tricks it knew to get free. In the course of its antics it stood on my right foot and hurt the big toe, which had to be amputated after the war. The wound affected the nail, which started to grow into the flesh and made me lame. Then two years after the war it was removed, and finally the toe itself had to be amputated. Well, I held that animal for hours and in the end it was killed. Some German guns were shelling the road; some shells dropped on one side, some on the other. At length Jerry was rewarded, and put a salvo right on the road, in the middle of marching troops. Instead of spreading them out, the officer in charge had kept them all bunched up together, and the slaughter was much greater than it need have been. The scared commander of the battalion was most anxious to get away before another salvo came, and he gave orders to keep going. Dark red stains in the mud showed where the doomed men had fallen. I counted twenty-five dead that had been thrown on the side of the road. Limbs lay without owners and part of a torso had fallen a few yards from me. Another battalion came along soon afterwards, and the sight of the blood and dead provoked various remarks; among others I heard the following:

"By Christ, some b——s 'ave touched 'ere awright."

"The second battalion always was unlucky."

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"Look at that bastard who used ter be in charge o' our platoon. I'm glad they got 'im."

"Them shells don't 'arf make a mess of a feller."

"Most of 'em got it in the guts or the 'ead, Tom; look at that sergeant's giblets, enough ter put a man orf 'is dinner."

"Gorblimy, Bert, 'e won't feel the cold any more."

"I don't mind being killed, but let me remain whole an' be buried decent."

"What would 'is old woman say if she could see 'im nah?"

"Why the 'ell don't they cover 'em over? 'Tain't right ter leave bloody bodies like that in front of a feller when 'e's goin' up the line. Puts the wind up a chap."

"My God, look at that poor sod. They gutted 'im awright."

"D'yer think they suffered much?"

"Some did an' some didn't. If yer gets 'it fair an' square yer never feel nothink."

A little chap stared at a corpse and said quietly to his pal: "The end of a 'ero; trampled in the dirt an' trodden on."

At about noon, nearly six hours after Oliver gave me his horse, a shell dropped a few yards away, and that was the last of the horse. His entrails were hanging out, and half the head had been blown clean off. It dropped in a heap and I fell full length in the mud, more frightened than hurt. The animal had been killed instantly, and the pool of blood was deep enough for ducks to swim in.

At once I set out to look for the captain. I knew roughly the direction in which he had gone and followed it. He was lying in an old trench on a hill known, if my memory serves me aright, as Notre Dame de Lorette. There was a flat piece of shell-case lying near his head, and, when I examined him, I saw he was suffering from concussion. I carried him slung across my back and brought him to the officers' mess of an artillery battery. There the M.O. revived him and we walked home together. He commended me for holding the horse so long on a road that was under constant shell-fire. It was refreshing to walk and talk with an officer who treated me like a human being

and not like a worm. I was rather silent, and, noticing it, Captain Oliver said :

"Why are you so quiet, Saint-Mandé?"

"Because I rarely walk with officers, sir, and most of those I have come in contact with treated me and my fellow-rankers in such a contemptible manner that I despised them for ignorant boors."

"They are not all rotters, you know," he said with a laugh, "although I can quite understand how galling it must be for an educated man to be bossed by cubs hardly out of their napkins."

"I do not resent strict discipline, sir," I explained. "It is absolutely necessary. But the badgering and bullying of men who volunteered to fight, by vulgar Non. Coms. and inexperienced officers, does no good. It riles the men and impairs their *moral*."

Captain Oliver agreed with most of my remarks and confessed that he hated the war as much as I did. We reached the camp a little after dusk, and I fell asleep in my clothes, wet as they were, as soon as I reached the tent.

Next day was Sunday and we had the afternoon off. It was a fine day, the sun tried to warm us and dry up some of the mud, birds sang in the trees, and we felt more cheerful than we had for many months. We felt summer was on the threshold. I went for a walk with six others and we walked through the park noticing the buds and new shoots. Wild flowers grew in one corner of the wood, and we sat there smoking on a log. Two of my companions were countrymen, and longed to be back on the farms where so much was to be done. All were recent arrivals in France and held me in a kind of awe because of my ribbons.

"I suppose you're a regular?" asked one.

"A regular bloody fool," I answered; "I was at school when the war started."

Those men had only enlisted when they were forced to do so, and could not understand a man putting on his age to get into the army. They were not fools nor cowards, only plain peasants who had no desire to kill other men, and longed for their fields all the time.

Captain Oliver visited some of the batteries in the neigh-

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bourhood of Notre Dame de Lorette and began taking me with him. Most of the guns were well hidden ; those on the plain were camouflaged, and a number were dug in on the side of the hill. One battery was firing rapidly on targets in Lens ; an aeroplane was directing the fire. I went into one gun-pit and watched the gunners at work. The gun was under elephant arches, with just a narrow slit for the muzzle to stick through. Heavy thick smoke filled the pit, for sand-bags had been piled up at the back, and the smoke could not get out. Two gunners were gassed by the fumes and we dragged them outside. I watched the gun-layer at work, and saw how easy it was for a careless or incompetent layer to put shells in his own trenches ; the human factor is a potent one in gunnery, and, when firing at a certain rate, a man will be tempted to bang the shells off, even when the exact range or elevation is not indicated. Then a bubble has to be perfectly level, and in the excitement of rapid fire it often was not.

The gunners, on the whole, seemed to me to have a less trying time than the infantry. Usually their shelters were fairly comfortable, and they were not often within range of rifle-bullets. Of course when a battery was spotted it was liable to have a most unpleasant time, but often for weeks they found things quiet enough. I discussed matters with a big gunner, and he said it was O.K. at the guns, but bloody rotten at the wagon-line. That was where the wagons and horses were kept while the guns were in action, and where petty tyranny could be indulged in by those in authority.

We were in billets which were ruined cottages ; they leaked every time it rained. I was in a room about ten feet square with fifteen others. There was no room for our equipment, and we called it the "black hole of Calcutta." When we smoked and stuffed the holes and cracks with paper to keep out the draughts, the fug was enough to kill a polecat. One evening we sat on the floor round a blanket playing banker. We were thoroughly exhausted and had to be up at four in the morning, yet we played as if we hadn't a care in the world. Owing to the cooks having got drunk, and the rain making it impos-

sible to light a fire, we had no warm food until 10 p.m., when one of the sobered scullions brought a dixie of watery soup.

In billets one night we were merry, for we had been paid, and had plenty of smokes. I had been able to bribe an Army Service Corps Q.M.S. and secured a jar of rum. With hot water and sugar pinched from the cooks it warmed our hearts, and we were as happy as crickets. It was indeed remarkable that, having passed through such harrowing experiences, and having nothing but more bloodshed before us, we could so far forget things as to laugh and joke with unrestrained mirth.

We started discussing the corpse factory which the Germans were alleged to be running. Newspapers printed sensational accounts of bundles of dead soldiers having been seen passing through certain stations, *en route* for the boiling-down process. Some of the men were inclined to believe it, but most of us thought it another damn lie to stir up hatred. "Why shouldn't they get fat out of bodies?" cried Brown. "The crime is in killing a man, in extinguishing the flame of life. What you do with the clay doesn't matter a damn. You can burn it, bury it or let it dry on top of a hill as they do in Madagascar, for example. Most of us will fertilize the ground; so if they can extract a little tallow from our carcasses every patriot should rejoice."

Next day Brown and I were sent on an errand to a neighbouring town, and came upon an extraordinary sight. A naked woman was being pursued by a gendarme, while soldiers lined the road laughing and cheering. It was impossible to tell whether the female was insane or drunk, but she could certainly run and the policeman had a hopeless task.

We were preparing to go up the line again and most of the men were writing letters. The young recruits were happy enough for they knew not what awaited us, but the older men, especially those who had been wounded two, three, or even four times, looked grave, and silently calculated the chances of survival.

Two days later we took over some trenches in Lens.

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They ran through the streets and gardens, there were enormous wire barricades in front, and every house was strongly barricaded and furnished with loop-holes. We prowled and scrounged sundry objects in the ruins to make our shelters comfortable. The civilians must have cleared out in a great hurry, for pictures were hanging on the walls that were still intact, and the cupboards were full of linen, soiled and stained by the rain that poured through the shattered roofs. Many fine pictures had been prodded with bayonets and pierced by bullets. Beds, cradles, and cots lay broken and trampled on. Whenever a shell burst among the houses, bricks and boards went up in a cloud of dust and smoke. The tortured ruins looked sinister and gaunt at night, lit up by the Vêry lights, while machine-gun bullets crashed among the rubble and chipped pieces from the crumbling walls. In the weed-infested gardens a few bedraggled flowers were trying to resist the shock of shells and smell of gas.

One night I slept in a hole with my legs sticking out into the trench. They were kicked and trampled on by countless passers-by, but I was too weary to get up. It was not till morning that I realized how far my legs had protruded from the hole.

I was sitting in a cellar with the section when a sergeant rushed in shouting: "Come on, you b—s, quick, Fritz is coming."

We seized our rifles and dashed out, just in time to see the field-grey figures rushing at us down the street. We shot until the rifles were hot, and bombs were flung in showers. A group of Jerries worked nearer, however, skilfully taking advantage of every bit of cover. They were led by an officer and an N.C.O., both big, determined-looking fellows. After losing most of their men, they took refuge with the survivors behind a barricade about thirty yards away. I pointed out to the sergeant that by crawling along the shattered upper floors of the houses one could blot the Jerries out. "Who the hell d'yer think will do it?" he demanded, red-eyed and bloody from a cut across his cheek. He was a fine fellow, courageous and a splendid leader. "I'll never ask a man to do what I wouldn't do myself,"

he added, "and that job's a damn sight too risky for me." The recruits were pale and in a blue funk. Besides, I felt that if the Germans were reinforced they would soon finish us. Partly from a desire to impress the recruits, and partly, I suppose, from natural love of adventure, I replied to the sergeant: "Well, I'll have a mucking go at it, anyway."

I calculated that the risks in the trench were almost as great as they would be up in the houses, and I would rather be shot doing something than be blown to hell by a minny while standing in the trench. I took a supply of Mills bombs, for the rifle was useless. I climbed up broken stairs hanging by a couple of nails, and along rafters long since shattered and threatening to collapse at any moment. At every moment I expected to be blown up by one of the numerous shells that were whistling and crashing through the tops of the ruined dwellings. The beams creaked and shook ominously; a piece of wall crashed near me and half blinded me in a cloud of reddish dust. The distance I had to cross seemed more like thirty miles than that number of yards. My hands were torn with nails and splinters. Suspended in space I felt sick with fear, when a sudden burst of machine-gun bullets sent bricks and plaster tumbling round me.

It took me half an hour to reach my goal, and there were the Germans lying behind their improvised barricade at the side of the house. There were eight of them as far as I could see; they were lying on their bellies sniping at my pals. If they saw me before I could throw my bombs that would be the end of me. In less than four seconds I had tossed half a dozen bombs among them; the bursts were terrific, I could feel the repercussions. The Germans were a bloody mess, but one managed to get me before he died. I saw him take aim, and he fired just at the instant I threw the bomb that shattered his head. The bullet entered my left cheek, smashed the lower jaw-bone and most of my teeth. The shock and pain were so severe that I lost my hold on the beam across which I was straddling, and crashed on to a heap of boards, bricks and rubble.

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The fall did me considerable damage for the height was about twenty feet, and when I recovered consciousness I was glad to find no bones were broken. My situation was precarious, as bullets were flying over my head from both sides, and a bulky mass of masonry overhead swayed each time a shell burst in the vicinity. I tried to crawl back to the trench, and had covered about a third of the distance, when a falling brick struck my head and I relapsed into unconsciousness.

When I awoke my head was throbbing, I had lost a lot of blood and my face was swollen to such an extent that the skin was as tight as a drum. The blood had nearly choked me; but when I attempted to dress the wound the excruciating pain made me desist. Remembering my morphia tablets I took one and that was enough to put me to sleep. Again I awoke and looked at my watch, but it had been broken in the fall. I was exhausted, very feverish, and racked with pain. Peeping through a crack in a wall, I saw a fierce fight going on at the end of the street.

One did not see the bayonet used very often, but, in that fierce encounter, the long red knives did great execution, and most of the dead lay with holes in their bellies. They were twisted into grotesque shapes; most of them were bent forward with their knees up. It was impossible to tell who won, for the survivors, if there were any, had disappeared. While I watched the slaughter at the corner, the whole area, which had been mined, went up like a monster volcano. The houses shot up in the air, disintegrating into the component parts before coming back to earth. I saw only one body, which was thrown high above the houses, before disappearing in the smoke and dust. Pieces of boards and bricks were dropping all round me and I crawled under a thick beam for protection. I was scarcely under it when a heavy lump of iron struck the top side with a terrific force and the sweat stood in great beads on my forehead.

Gradually night came on and I welcomed the darkness as it gave me a better chance of escape. The fever made me delirious at times and I heard later that I was raving



when picked up by two men who had volunteered to search for me. I recovered my senses in the dressing-station, when the doctor was picking bits of bone out of my face. I was suffering from shock and my condition was serious; the doctor looked grave. He asked me what church I belonged to and when I told him I belonged to none, he smiled.

After a few minutes he said: "It is my duty to tell you that your condition is serious and you may not recover. Do you require a priest or do you wish to leave any message?"

I shook my head to signify that I desired neither, and tears came into my eyes. Death had no terrors for me, but it was hard to die in a strange land surrounded by strangers. It would have been so much easier in England, looking out over the fields and meadows I loved so well. I remembered some words from Emerson in which he talks about death being natural, elemental, even fair out of doors, but disagreeable in a building. I would have preferred to die out in the sun with a fresh breeze fanning my face. Death was horrible with blood on the floor and groaning men on every side. The smell of anaesthetics mingled with odours of sweat and dirt; I wanted to vomit.

The place was the usual shambles. It reminded me of a butcher's shop, except that the carcasses were taken out for burial instead of being strung up round the walls. Two doctors came and examined me; they decided to perform an emergency operation as I was in danger of choking. When I came to again I heard one of the medicos whisper to the other: "Send him down to the C.C.S.; there's just a chance of his standing the journey and he'll die here in any case."

The journey to the clearing station took four hours, and the thought that I had started gave me courage. The will to live has a tremendous influence over the body. Modern psychology is only beginning to show the extraordinary correlation between the physical and psychic. Often during those critical days I felt that it would have been easy to abandon hope and just sink. At first I was fed through the nose by means of a rubber tube, for my jaws would not open.

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One day Sergeant Lane, who had been with me in the trench, was carried in. He had lost an arm and his head was bandaged. A man who could walk acted as intermediary, and brought me the news that a man had been killed trying to bring me in soon after I fell. The Germans made a desperate attack on a wide front, sending up several mines. Our losses had been heavy, but, after several days' fighting, the enemy were repulsed.

For a few days my state was unchanged ; it was as if I was wrestling with death, and neither of us could secure an advantage. A week after my admission the doctor, when he came to me, asked me if there was anything he could do. I could not speak, but wrote on paper that I wanted to go to England. He promised that I should go as soon as I gained some strength. That night I was sent to Etaples and five days later was in England.

My destination was a hospital in Hampshire. At first I took but little interest in what went on round me, for there was a screen round my bed.

## CHAPTER XXII

ON the second day my parents came to see me. Mother looked a wreck, as I had expected, and father had aged considerably. I was still unable to speak, but wrote on my pad that I was glad to see them, and that I was getting on beautifully. They were not allowed to stay more than an hour for fear of tiring or exciting me, the fool who gave the order being apparently unaware that their presence was the best tonic I could possibly have. They sat and looked at me with love and pity; mother wept most of the time. I was afraid to ask about Duncan lest she should break down again.

They asked me the usual questions; they ran more or less as follows:

"It must have been terrible, for the papers said the fighting was most desperate."

"Oh, it wasn't so bad."

"Can't any one put a stop to it?"

"It won't last much longer now, both sides are almost exhausted."

"Were there many killed?"

"There were some killed but most were wounded."

"Did you get the parcels we sent?"

"One came about a month ago."

"We sent one every other day."

"Oh well, they weren't wasted. Some hungry Tommies wolfed them."

"Did you see the Germans committing any atrocities?"

"Only about as many as we committed."

"Tell us what it was like in the battle."

"I don't really remember. We were all excited and there was plenty of smoke, but everything was so confused that one's recollections are of necessity hazy."

"What were you doing when you got wounded?"

"Trying to keep under cover as much as possible."

"You will never have to go back to France, that's one consolation."

A nurse came and told them it was time to go. Mother wept and kissed me on the bit of face that was visible.

Next day Jean came and was sitting near my bed when I opened my eyes. She looked as beautiful as of yore, but there were lines under her eyes, and she was pale. I took her hand and saw that she was weeping. She seemed terribly upset at the mass of bandages round my face, and I wrote a question asking her if she could still love me with a mutilated face. She put her head on the side of the bed and sobbed convulsively. I still loved her in spite of the separations and lapses in our correspondence. She promised to call again in a few days and left, after putting some gorgeous flowers on my table, and leaving a tiny scented handkerchief behind her. She left it on the bed while arranging my little table, so I kept it as a souvenir.

I underwent ten operations altogether and won through after a gruelling time. When the surgeons had finished I had a silver plate holding my lower jaw together and some more false teeth which allowed me to chew. When I was able to look in the glass I thought I was contemplating a ghost. My beard was six inches long and my mouth awry. The bullet-hole had left a distinct scar and the skin was puckered up round it. The plate bulged slightly and the expression was extremely fierce, with the scar on my forehead and the mutilated ear.

As soon as I could chew I gained strength rapidly and put on weight. One day, when the doctor asked me if the plate were comfortable, I told him that it was a bit stiff and probably needed oiling. He laughed and said: "That's the spirit, my lad, never get down in the mouth even if you have got a plate in it."

I began helping with the small jobs like sweeping and making beds, and was helping the day nurse to straighten the covers when the matron came in with a wire and showed it to me. My head went giddy and I nearly fainted, for the message was that notice had been taken of my con-

## WAR, WINE AND WOMEN

spicuous bravery in destroying twelve Germans who had secured a footing dangerously near a part of the British line that had been weakened by casualties. The strange thing about it was that, according to the official report, the Germans had a machine-gun, although I certainly did not see it. A patrol brought it in the following night.

Congratulations were showered on me. All the doctors and nurses came to shake hands. The men were too kind and almost every one gave me some small present. I heard at first that they were getting up a collection to buy something, but I told them I was averse to the idea, for most of them were extremely poor. Most of them were doing needlework and gave me specimens of their art. I felt a fraud, for many of those men had done deeds as brave as mine, and almost all my pals under the sod had been braver than I. In addition the award gave me but little real pleasure for, rightly or wrongly, the conviction was firmly rooted in my mind that killing was murder, whether the victims were compatriots or belonged to some other country. Of course I argued that until the Germans were beaten no peace worthy of the name was possible, so the hellish business had to be borne to its logical conclusion.

I could not sleep at all that night. I felt glad for my people's sake and my vanity kept wondering if Jean would be pleased. Then I thought of all those fine lads who, in spite of their uncouth language and rough manners, were decent honest fellows. Those who had trained with me and had suffered in the mud and pestilential air of Ypres, the Somme, Vimy and a score of other places. O my poor dead and mutilated comrades! Shall I ever forget the horrors you went through, the cold and wet, the lice, hunger, and with what patience you bore it all? Often I see in my memory's eye your bloody heads with matted hair and deadly pallor. I see you putting on your packs in silence, marching to the desolate and ghastly trenches where death and horrible wounds, poison gas and shell shock awaited you. I see others coughing and trembling with disease due to exposure. Of those who survive many will be crippled with rheumatism and age prematurely as a result of those grisly years. Often in the stillness of the night I woke up

with a start thinking I was being murdered, and even now, twelve long years after the curtain was rung down on the colossal tragedy, I am often racked with pain, and my wounds tell me when the weather is going to change. But humanity will forget your sacrifices, and your blood will have been spilled in vain, for the politicians undid all your work, and Europe is arming for new wars. When the fighting ceased Tommy had admiration and respect for a brave foe, but even on the morning of the Armistice an order was circulated forbidding all fraternizing.

My services as a barber were in great demand. No one in the ward would undertake the job, so I set up as shaver and hair-cutter. As the service was gratis a number of my companions were always willing to undergo the ordeal. At first I had no idea of how to cut hair, and left a number of bald patches where the scissors had cut too deeply; their gashed cheeks bore witness to the slip of the razor. Gradually I acquired a fair measure of skill and my fame spread to other wards, so that usually I had a queue near my chair.

The announcement in the press of my action brought me a large number of letters, mostly from flappers. My autograph was in great demand and love-lorn maidens sent me photographs and even gifts. It is astounding how women worship a murderer. Among the letters was one from Daphne. I had lost trace of her and didn't even know her address. She had married a rich man for whom she had no love, and announced that she was coming down next day. I read her letter with mixed feelings, for I realized that Jean was the only girl I really loved and desired. At night I buried my head in the pillow and saw again those moments of rapture Daphne and I had spent together. It was only two and a half years since we had been together, but to me it seemed æons. I was tormented by the fear that Jean would be too shocked by my appearance to visit me again, and I thought of her with some bitterness. Surely her love was too strong to be killed by a facial injury? I wrote asking her if my disfigurement was the cause of her silence and awaited her reply with some trepidation.

Next morning Daphne drove up in a big luxurious car.

I watched her from the window and my heart beat a little faster as she rang at the front bell. I had secured leave and knew that if I overstayed it by a day or so nothing would be said. I had special privileges and took full advantage of them. We met in the hall downstairs and were both rather constrained, and I watched her closely to see what effect the sight of my face would have. She was obviously taken aback and gasped :

"O my poor Wilfred ! They have knocked you about."

"It was said of old time that all handsome men were slightly sunburnt," I replied with a grin. "Now the fashion is for handsome men to wear scars—not that I was ever particularly beautiful."

"Oh, you were," she protested, "it was your face that attracted me when first we met."

"Well, I shall not need to look in the glass any more, for I know now I'm ugly, and can concentrate on serious matters," I pointed out with levity.

Daphne was as beautiful as of yore and had evidently ordered her clothes from Paris. She had a certain *chic* ; her carriage made men turn in the street. I had on rough boots and an old blue suit, the contrast was rather striking. We drove to a village near the sea. It was on the edge of beautiful country and far enough from main roads to be completely unspoiled. It was a delightful day when we arrived ; the sun was warm and a gentle breeze rustled the firs that came almost to the hotel door. I signed the book, making use of fictitious names, and pretending we were husband and wife.

In the evening after dinner we went and sat on the sands ; there was a dune almost at the water's edge and we climbed to the top. The moon was like a silver plate, the waters gleamed in its rays and lapped lazily against a little wooden pier, old and crumbling. Daphne talked of love and when I spread a rug on the sand we lay in an ardent embrace.

We wandered through the fir groves, admiring the effects of the moonbeams among the trees. The leaves whispered to us as we passed and the needles formed a carpet under our feet. We stopped occasionally to embrace, and suddenly Daphne said : "We must stay here awhile,

it is too beautiful to leave," so we spread out the rug again and lay down in the wood.

We parted outside the hospital next morning a little before noon. As soon as I got inside I heard that I had been transferred to a convalescent hospital a few miles away. It was a private house, and I went there with a dozen others. My stay there lasted two weeks and was very happy, for I managed to forget my troubles in games.

Next day I received a letter from Jean. It was a curious document and seemed to have been written under the stress of great emotion. The gist of it was that she still loved me but could not bear to look at my mutilated face as it made her feel ill.

She tried to struggle against it but to no purpose. Finally she begged for time to get over the shock. I felt hurt and bitter, for I failed to realize what mere looks in a man could have to do with a woman's love. With a generosity that I did not think myself capable of, I wrote by return saying that I understood and bore no malice.

At the end of my second week there I asked to be marked out. The inaction started to get on my nerves and once again I became restless. I left on the Saturday morning and arrived home in time for lunch. We were all quiet and spoke in sad tones. It was a relief to get away in the evening and take a bus into the city.

On my return home there was a letter for me, and opening it I found that it was an order to report to a camp in Yorkshire on the expiration of my leave. I had another five days. Sometimes I made up my mind to try to see Jean but could not screw up my courage sufficiently to call and stand, suppliant-like, at her door. She appeared to have deserted her old haunts and I visited them in vain.

On the day before I was due to depart for the north I received a telephone call and was spoken to by a strange woman. She asked me to meet her in town at a certain restaurant.

Thinking that the caller knew me, I agreed, having nothing better to do, and feeling sure that the owner of such a musical voice must be a most charming person; nor was



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I disappointed. When I walked in to the rendezvous an extremely handsome woman came to meet me and escorted me to her table. She was American and most vivacious. From her story I gathered that her husband was a wealthy banker but too busy to give his wife that love for which she craved. Naturally she tired after a while of twiddling her thumbs at home, and took up nursing. After my second or third glass of wine I inquired :

"Have we met before?"

"No," she answered, "but I saw your photograph in the paper and decided I should like to know you."

"But whatever for?"

"Because, to put it bluntly, you are a man, and it would give me pleasure to be loved by you."

"I regret to say I leave town to-morrow."

"Well, we have to-day."

The woman's beauty fascinated me and I needed no persuasion to accept her invitation. A big car was waiting outside and we drove to Maidenhead, where my companion rented a luxuriously-furnished bungalow. She was pining for romance and proved to be a most voluptuous woman. She was about thirty, of medium height, with fair hair and a smart figure.

Some women slouch about clumsily and look as if they are too tired to walk properly, but Stella was a thoroughbred and radiated energy. Her figure was slim but not thin. The waist was very slim but the buttocks were well developed and moved up and down with a peculiar snaky motion as she walked. The legs were shapely even when naked. Stella showed me photographs of her husband, and he was a typical American with big spectacles and a clean-shaven face.

"Why did you leave him?" I asked, as we lay smoking.

"Because he was too busy to love me. Our men are most loving as long as they are chasing a girl, but, as soon as she is caught, they tire of her and return to the most fascinating game of all, which is making dollars. They are too practical and don't know what romance means. They think it means a big car and a well-appointed house. But those things never gave happiness, and never will."

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"Still, you must have seen pictures of officers far more handsome than I, with my stitched and patched jaw; why did you not choose one with more experience of life and nearer you in age?"

"Well, the papers gave an account of your career since joining the army, how you enlisted under age and had already become distinguished.

"It was mentioned also that you had won a scholarship to Oxford, yet would not accept a commission. An older man would have been blasé, whereas you are in the full flush of youth and full of vigour in spite of your wounds. I wanted an educated man with a love of adventure, and when I selected you I bore in mind the fact that you are single, most of the others are married."

Before we retired for the night Stella bathed in scented water and I followed suit; then she burnt some kind of incense that made the air heavy with fragrance.

I felt a rotter at having spent the last night away from home, and had to make excuses when I got back. Stella gave me her address and promised to come up to Yorkshire as soon as I was settled. I just had time to collect my things and catch the train.

In his "Journal of a Voyage to Lisbon" Fielding tells of a farmer called Humphreys and his wife. The husband was plump and had a smiling face; his wife was short and squat with a sour expression. Just as it was impossible to displease the man so it was impossible to please the woman. I met such a couple in the train to Ripon.

They clambered in just as I was settling down in the corner and congratulating myself on having the compartment to myself. The woman's tongue was audible long before she reached the carriage, and, as soon as she got in, she scowled at me as if I had no right to be there. Her poor husband came sweating under all the baggage and mopped his brow with a large red handkerchief. He had actually carried two gladstone-bags, a large hold-all, and three nondescript packages. He grinned at me and started smoking the strong tobacco I like. It is a man's weed. Let youths and maidens keep their cigarettes, as long as I can keep a stock of my favourite

brand that makes pusillanimous knaves cough and wipe their eyes.

When the farmer had arranged his several packages on the rack and under the seat I told him a story I had read many years before. The farmer laughed heartily at the joke, but his hatchet-faced wife only sniffed and glared. She objected to opening any of the windows and said she couldn't stand the smoke. I went and looked in the next compartment, and found it was a non-smoker with three spinsters, whose looks would have turned milk sour. Addressing the farmer's wife with much politeness I said: "Madam, I am sorry you object to smoke and fresh air, but as I intend to smoke from here to Ripon and to keep my window open at the same time, you had better go into the next compartment where the passengers neither smoke nor open the windows." The virago continued to glare and said nothing.

After an awkward silence her husband asked me if I had any more jokes, so I made a selection among those which could be told in the presence of a farmer's wife. Two or three were appreciated by the smiling male, while his jaundiced partner did nothing but frown and glare.

At last I found a story that shifted her. It was about an election meeting. A woman heckler having exhausted her stock of vituperation waved her umbrella and howled: "If I were your wife I'd give you poison." "Yes, madam," replied the candidate, "and if I were your husband I'd take it." I had scarcely finished the story when the woman opposite attacked me with her umbrella, trying to hit me on the head with it. Losing my patience I snatched it from her, broke it over my knee, and threw it out of the window. She then attacked her husband for not defending her, and bashed his bowler hat flat on his face.

I watched the scene in amazement, for he was a powerful man, and two of the smacks on his face must have stung. When she had worked off some of her fury she picked up her bag and barged into the next compartment.

I offered my companion a drink from a bottle of whisky I was carrying, and he begged me to stand in the doorway

so that his wife might not see, in case she came along at that moment. The longsuffering fellow took a big drink and his gratitude was touching. According to his story he had married the daughter of the local parson, who was considered a great prize. However, as soon as the poor chap got married he discovered that his wife had a most vicious temper, and, backed up by her parents, gave her husband hell. He had endured it for five years and it was getting beyond a joke, as he put it. He had been denounced from the pulpit and was in fear of hell fire if he opposed his wife in any way. When the tale was finished I asked :

"Do you consider yourself a man?"

"I suppose I am a fool," he replied.

"Have you enough money to live on?"

"Yes, I'm not a poor man and am farming simply for pleasure."

"I shouldn't have thought there was much pleasure farming in England," I laughed, "but perhaps there is when you haven't got to make it pay, and of course as long as the war lasts they are in clover. Look here, why not sell your farm and join the army?"

"I'm too old?"

"What is your age?"

"Forty-five."

"Just the right age. It's now or never. Unless you assert yourself now you are doomed. Take my advice and enlist. It will make a man of you and you'll meet fine fellows, have adventures galore and a rollicking life."

The whisky had gone to my head and I talked like a recruiting-sergeant. No one could have given a more elaborate encomium of the military life. My companion swore he would enlist. As the train steamed into York I took him away to the end of the train and soon found a recruiting office. Here the farmer was duly sworn in, and joined my regiment as I assured him they took only good men. I knew I should arrive late at the command depot, and secured a letter from the recruiting officer certifying that I had broken my journey to take a man to the recruiting office. Unfortunately the farmer had to go to London so that we arranged to part in York. He wrote to his wife

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telling her he had enlisted and was giving orders for the farm to be sold, so that she could go and live with her parents.

We retired to our room in a York hotel after roaming about the city. A zealous policeman said we were drunk and wanted to arrest us, but we stood on one leg and convinced him that we were sober. We sat on our beds until long past midnight discussing the day's events. The landlord's wife came with her autograph album, for she had read of my notoriety and had seen my photograph in the papers. We invited her to be seated and before long persuaded her husband to come also. He brought more booze and we had a merry time.

### CHAPTER XXIII

WE separated next morning, he went to London and I to Ripon. On arrival I was severely admonished for overstaying my leave, but the C.O. was a good sort and immediately afterwards congratulated me on my medals. The country round Ripon teemed with soldiers; there were camps everywhere. It was a God-forsaken hole, never a girl to be seen unless on the arm of an officer. Duncan was training in the district, having been slightly wounded, and I called on him the very first evening. He looked fit enough, but such a child. Most of his companions in the hut were not more than eighteen and I felt sorry for them, forgetting that I was not as old as many of them when I enlisted. When I looked at my battered countenance in the glass I found it hard to believe that I was not yet twenty-one.

On the first Saturday afternoon we walked to Fountains Abbey, and felt far away from the war while walking through the lovely park. I could see that Duncan was anxious to get back to France, but I urged him to lie low and volunteer for nothing. He was fed up to the back teeth with camp life and the idiotic fatigues. At the back of my mind was the fear that he would surely be killed and that would be the end of mother. We explored the ruins and watched the deer among the trees. It was getting dark when we wandered back to the town and met a number of Duncan's pals, all stony broke. I treated them to fried fish and chipped potatoes. As we wandered up the street, eating our supper out of newspapers, a red-cap stopped us and abused us roundly for disgracing the King's uniform. He pulled out a book and pencil to take names. It was too dark for him to recognize me, for I was about twenty paces from him. Detaching myself from the group while he

was writing. I caught him from behind and he was helpless. It did not take long to throw him in the river after taking his book from him. He swam for the shore and we ran, highly elated at the discomfiture of our mortal enemy.

Next morning Stella drove up, having received my address the previous day. She proposed going to Harrogate and I soon squared the sergeant, who always wanted money for drink. Discipline was not very strict, most of the routine being remedial exercises and marching. I promised him liberal payment if he could conceal my absence for two or three days, and he promised to do his best.

Stella was beaming with joy when I reached her at the gate with a case containing civilian clothes. We drove to Harrogate and put up at an hotel.

In the afternoon we drove into the country and, leaving the car in a farmyard, walked over the moors. Autumn was coming on and the air was keen, with a slight mist on the horizon. We ran and played like children, revelling in the glorious weather. In a wood the dry leaves crackled under our feet and fell slowly from the half-naked trees.

We climbed a hill and entered a clump of beech trees, attracted by the copper and bronze on the leaves. Logs were lying across the path, for the trees were being thinned. Clambering over them we reached the middle of the coppice and spread our cloaks on the bracken and lay down to smoke and talk. Stella told me of a novel she had just read, and I asked her if she had ever read Swift's "Journal to Stella."

"Who was Swift?" whispered my Stella, tossing crumbs to a robin that hopped lightly on the path within a yard of us.

"Do you mean to say you have never heard of the famous Jonathan Swift?" I exclaimed in surprise, frightening away the bird.

"No, really," replied Stella, turning her large beautiful eyes to mine; "you see, I went to a primary school where they tried to stuff us with such a multitude of facts that we learnt nothing. Then I was sent to an academy for young ladies until father died. There they taught us deportment, eurhythmic, dancing and a few futilities. When father died I went on the stage and by losing my

virginity was soon given an important part. But tell me, who was this Swift you talk about ? "

" Well, it would take a long time to relate all his activities, but briefly, he was born in Dublin in the latter half of the seventeenth century, about 1665, and became a writer of some distinction before his mind gave way. He seems to have loved a girl named Esther Johnson for whom he wrote the Journal. He excelled in prose satire and some examples of it are the cleverest things of the kind I've ever seen. He could demolish his opponent's cause by pretending to embrace it. At times he was inhumanly bitter, as in the famous descriptions of the Yahoos. Many pious people protested when he proposed to relieve famine in Ireland by eating the children."

" Do you like poetry ? " queried Stella.

" It is one of the few things in life that can stir me to enthusiasm."

" Did Swift write poetry ? "

" Yes, but it's pretty poor stuff in my humble opinion."

" Did he marry Stella or Esther or whatever her name was ? "

" No."

" Why not ? "

" No one seems to know, although some think he had some physical defect which not only prevented marriage, but was the cause of his bitterness."

" We studied Pope's ' Rape of the Lock ' at the high school. He is one of the greatest English poets, isn't he ? "

" In my opinion Pope could not write poetry to save his life ; in fact he is not a poet at all in the highest and truest sense. In the whole of his work there is not one original thought, although he could be a great poet without being a deep or original thinker. Pope was a clever versifier and could describe a fish or a pheasant so well in verse that one could at once recognize the object after reading the description. But that's not poetry."

" Well, what is poetry ? " smiled Stella, putting her head on my shoulder and her arm round my neck.

" I'm afraid I can't tell you. No definition of poetry has ever satisfied me. Some books will tell you that it is a



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"I'm afraid I can't tell you. No definition of poetry has ever satisfied me. Some books will tell you that it is a

metrical composition. That is no definition. When a man's whole being is bursting with emotion and the gods have bestowed on him the rarest gifts, then he will write great poetry."

"I read a poem the other day called 'To an empty tin of toothpaste,' and it seemed to me very clever."

"It probably was. So is the man who can do a somersault backwards or swallow a sword, but neither trick appeals to me particularly. Poetry, I mean the highest kind, never deals with trite or banal things. A man like Pope could write very clever verse on a worn-out tooth-brush that continued to give faithful service in spite of its condition, but it would not be what I understand by poetry. The kind of poetry I love, the only kind worthy of the name, in my view, is as spontaneous as the babble of the brook, the song of the bird, the sighing of the wind among the trees of the forest or through the reeds on the shores of placid moon-lit waters."

"Will it be grave or gay?" asked Stella, pointing to the big red disc of the setting sun that made an exquisite picture through the trees.

"Grave as a rule, because it will treat of great emotions which may make us happy, but will never be trivial. All who have had any spiritual experience at all, who have loved, feared, prayed, or mourned; those who have been tormented by the problems of our origin and destiny, of the eternal conflict between the individual and the social order; people who have stumbled on life's rough path, who have fallen and bled among the thorns . . . they will not be frivolous or superficial if they have any heart and brain."

"Why is it that most people have no time for poetry or at best read very poor stuff?" murmured Stella, coming closer to me.

"Because most of us live like hibernating bears and know nothing about any of the arts. This is a mechanical, utilitarian age in which we are in danger of losing touch with simple and eternal realities."

We walked slowly to the farm and had tea there. In the evening, after dinner, we sat at the window of our room watching the sky. We discussed philosophy and Stella

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said she knew nothing about the subject and had always thought it silly, concerned with dreary and stupid disputations. She had at one time tried to read Hegel and had given it up as hopeless. I noticed a copy of Thoreau's "Walden" in the book-case and, taking it down, turned the leaves until I came to the following words in the first chapter: "To be a philosopher is not merely to have subtle thoughts, nor even to found a school, but so to love wisdom as to live according to its dictates, a life of simplicity, independence, magnanimity and trust."

We conversed in undertones until the noises below died away. Stella undressed and, in silk pyjamas, came to sit on my knees. The perfumed hair, the soft white flesh, the velvety clinging lips, the slender limbs, the tapering fingers that roamed over my body, gently caressing the scars, all combined to make the night memorable.

Jean had, for the time being, been driven out of my thoughts, and I abandoned myself to the voluptuous caresses of the lovely girl at my side.

Stella returned to London next day and I to the hut on the moors. The sergeant had successfully concealed my absence and detailed the difficulties he had encountered in doing so. When I gave him a pound he cringed and fawned with delight; he had no doubt expected a few shillings.

Next evening I sat smoking and reading in a corner of the hut and listened to three men cursing the absence of all amenities round the camp. They looked decent fellows and had been wounded more than once. That was an important consideration, for in a way we were blood-brothers. In spite of myself I never had the same regard for men who had not bled at the front. Those evenings were so long and dull that they almost drove me to suicide. Looking at the three grumblers I said:

"There are plenty of ways of getting adventure."

"Tell us one," replied a youngish chap with a pleasant face. I had seen him stripped and noticed a terrible wound in the small of his back. It was as deep as a small cup and was covered by a leather pad on a belt. He was doing remedial exercises and in a couple of weeks would be marked fit because he was too honest to "swing the lead." The

doctor said he was sorry, but as the wound was not a serious disability he would have no option but to mark the man A.I.

"Why, there are plenty of bicycles near the orderly room. What is to prevent our stealing, or rather borrowing one each, and riding to Harrogate for an evening's amusement?"

"A bloody lot of amusement you can get without money," chimed in another bitterly.

I was in funds and felt like an escapade, for the camp was getting on my nerves.

"I've got money and am willing to stand you all a few drinks if you're keen on coming. Although you must not forget that if we're caught it means pack-drill or even cells, according to the old man's temper."

That put them on their mettle and the three announced their readiness to accompany me, thanking me in their rough homely way for my generosity.

"'Ow are we goin' ter git the bikes?" was the first question.

"That's easy," I explained. "We walk up and take the machines as if we were orderlies going with messages, but we must not go together, one at a time is best, then we meet down the road." The sentry was talking to a farm girl as we filed past at intervals of a hundred yards. She was a filthy slut. That wench had straw in her clogs and in some strange manner reminded me of an anecdote concerning Henri IV of France, who, returning from the wars, saw such a lass and overturned her on a heap of straw. She struggled and the king asked in surprise: "Whatever is the matter?"

"O, Sire, if you deign to do me this honour at least let me take off my sabots."

We came together at a bend in the road and reached Harrogate without incident. It was early in the evening and we made a bee-line for a pub. After three or four pints of strong ale we were as merry as crickets, and sang all the songs we knew.

Tiring of the pub we went to a theatre, a variety show. When we got inside we saw a tableau on the stage. Germany was on the floor, having been caught attempting to rape

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Belgium, represented by a pure young maiden in her undergarments. The flags of the Allies made a brave show, the rag of Germany was trampled underfoot, while the band blared and the crowd vociferated approval. The next item consisted of fat girls kicking up their legs so as to display their underpants while old roués in the front row gazed as if fascinated. Then a comedian came on and sang songs about the cowardly Hun soldiers, who did nothing but hold up their hands and shout for mercy. One song started as an imitation of "K-K-K-Katie."

"K-K-K-Kamerad (*twice*),  
That is all the Heine soldiers shout,  
And when we charge 'em, over the trenches,  
We put them to a blankety blankety rout."

"Shut your face, you bloody liar," yelled one of my companions, "they're a damn sight braver than you."

Half a dozen men in uniform were brought to chuck us out. They were commissionaires and we would have gone quietly had they used a little tact. Inspired no doubt by the audience, they began to use force, and in a few minutes we had wiped the floor with them without hurting them unduly. After that we left quietly and were allowed to depart in peace. We walked quickly, as the manager had probably telephoned for reinforcements and we had no desire to spend the night in the cells. One of the tyres was punctured and we were too fuddled to mend it, so took another machine standing against the wall.

The journey back was uneventful until we were within half a mile of the camp. We were riding abreast and had agreed to make a dash if any police tried to stop us. Suddenly two of them dashed out from the sides of the road, calling on us to stop. We pedalled like fury and I sent one flying back into the ditch with a swing of my foot to his belly. When we reached the camp entrance the sentry was at the far end of his beat so we threw the cycles against the orderly room and ran for our hut, where the inmates were playing cards, the windows having been covered with blankets. We breathlessly explained what had happened and all secured belts with which to welcome the invaders.

The hut was surrounded by barbed wire and soon we heard our enemies fall into it. Orders had been given to plant flowers round the huts and the wire was to protect the blooms. We fell upon our foes in the moonlight, having hastily covered our faces with boot polish.

The poor rascals were severely handled, but I had no pity for them; too many of my pals had suffered at their hands. When they had been sufficiently beaten we carried them to the end of the parade ground where stood some barrels of tar, and one of the men found a big pillow stuffed with feathers that a comfort-loving man had brought from home. The two sleuths were stripped and thoroughly tarred, then the feathers were applied until the sufferers looked like a couple of gigantic roosters. One was fat and short, the other thin and tall. When the job was finished we tied their hands and feet in such a way that they would be able to release themselves after ten minutes or so. We ran like the wind back to the huts, and helped to remove the tar from the hands of the man who had wielded the brush.

Next morning the whole camp was in an uproar, for the police were on the war-path and everyone had to attend an identification parade. We lined up after breakfast and the two Redcaps with some officers came round to pick out the culprits. All the men grimaced and made rude noises with their mouths. Some crowed like hens and others indulged in satirical catcalls. The military coppers were in bad odour with our commanding officer and we took full advantage of the fact. The only man they were able to pick out was able to prove an alibi, and the detested martinets retired extremely crestfallen. In the evening we had a grand celebration in the canteen. When we reached home some sat playing cards in a cloud of tobacco smoke. It was solo whist, and woe to a man who propped or copped without holding good enough cards!

"What the blazes? Why d'yer put a feller up when yer've only got queen high?"

"Must take a risk, mate; no good waiting for a bleedin stone-waller. Be a sport."

"God! down again! This won't buy the kids a new shirt."

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"'Ow the 'ell d'yer expect ter win if yer don't git aht trumps first? Yer know the old sayin' that there's many a feller walkin' the Strand with the backside of 'is trousers patched because 'e wouldn't draw trumps."

"Cards never forgive, if yer never specerlate yer never accumerlate."

Presently the door was flung open and in rushed a gang of Jocks whose camp was on the other side of the road. They were armed with belts and sticks and had been drinking. In a few seconds the hut was the scene of a fierce battle. The invaders numbered about fifty and the advantage of numbers was slightly in our favour. My companions jumped from their kips and fought in their shirts; only a few of us were dressed. Several men were knocked out and lay on the floor bleeding from the head, where the metal buckles had inflicted nasty wounds. I laid out a number by swinging my belt in a circle so that all who were hit dropped like logs. Men were rolling on the floor fighting like savages and blood flowed freely. I was bleeding from a fairly deep gash on the forehead, and was afraid the issue of the conflict was going to be decided against us, when men from adjoining huts came to our aid, and, in a short time, the fighting Jocks were trussed up like fowls. They were tried and stated that their raid was in retaliation for one carried out on their camp the previous evening. We decided that they would have to run the gauntlet and released them one by one to crawl between our legs while their backsides were belaboured with belts.

Before we had finished we were again attacked by other Jocks who had heard of the predicament of their comrades. Our hut was wrecked and they burnt our beds before they, in their turn, were overwhelmed by reinforcements from surrounding huts. We then decided to carry the war into the enemy's territory and swooped across to the Scottish camp, assaulted all the sleepers in a certain area, burnt the tents and got back without serious damage. Next day there was an inquiry and we stated in evidence that we had been attacked in the night by unknown foes whom we had been unable to recognize. The Jocks at their inquiry maintained that they could not identify their assailants.



and, as far as I know, the authorities never got to the bottom of the matter.

On the following Sunday I received an invitation to take tea with a local parson who knew my father; Duncan was also invited. We hated the idea of going, but went in order not to displease our parents. It was four o'clock when we turned up at the parsonage, a charming dwelling covered with creeping plants and solidly built. The garden was carefully tended and beautiful climbing roses scented the air. It was a delightful retreat, quiet and comfortable.

A trim maid opened the door and showed us into what looked like a study. There were many shelves packed with theological tomes, and on the walls hung photographs of the cleric at different stages of his career. He was a self-satisfied man of about forty and had married a wealthy woman. Duncan and I conversed in undertones, feeling thoroughly ill at ease. After the maid had come to tell us that her master would not be long we had another wait of ten minutes or so, and then he came in like a whirlwind. His fat face was shiny and clean-shaven. It was round and jovial, covered with wrinkles when he smiled. His head was completely bald on top, and the hair had been brushed across in a not very successful effort to cover the shiny part. His paunch was prominent and a heavy gold chain hung across it. The legs were short and fat, slightly bandy. The hands attracted attention for they were large and fat. They were never still and were moving as if their owner were washing them all the time. A gold cross hung from the watch-chain and danced up and down every time the parson spoke. He had the unctuous voice cultivated so much by his kind, and it was most flexible. One did not require much imagination to visualize him thundering denunciations on the wicked, and luring backsliders back to the fold with caressing accents. Duncan and I sprang to our feet and, smiling awkwardly, stammered some greeting.

"Aha! This is a pleasure, my gallant soldier boys. Sit down, sit down, tea will be here in one minute. Mrs. James will be back soon, she went out for her little constitutional with the dogs, such little darlings, so playful and affectionate.

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Well, when are you going to finish off this old war? By the way, I believe I have to congratulate you, Wilfred, for winning some medals. Aha! Jolly good. It is remarkable how war brings out one's best qualities. Who would have thought the common people possessed such courage and tenacity? You know this war has been England's salvation. We were getting careless, materialistic and indifferent to spiritual matters. 'What shall it profit a man if he gain the whole world and lose his own soul?' We are being tested as gold is tested in the fire. The Lord loveth whom He chasteneth, mysterious are His ways, yea they are full of mystery and we cannot understand them. But even so the Lord of hosts is with us, the God of Jacob is our refuge. Often we are cast down and sore afraid, powerful are our enemies. Then if we are faithful God will be the strength of our confidence. He shall recompense them in their wickedness, and destroy them in their own malice, yea, the Lord our God shall destroy them. A great spiritual awakening is at hand, rich will be the harvest, may the reapers not be lacking.

"Many foolish folk pretend that God is indifferent to the cries of humanity because we cannot understand why certain things should be. I met a man this very day who has lost faith because his three sons have been killed in France.

"Those who are killed doing God's work are favoured beyond our wildest dreams. They will sit, resplendent in white, at His right hand."

The speaker was so complacent and smug, his smirks made me feel ill. Surrounded by luxury, the hog was pretending to serve the Carpenter who said: "Blessed are the poor," and who had a stone for a pillow. Duncan was too shy to say a word, but I tried to mutter approval, wondering how long it would be before we could get out and roar with laughter at the canting zealot.

While he was talking we heard dogs yelping in the garden and a woman's voice saying: "Now, my little pets, you must not go on the flowers." There was some whispering at the door between the maid and her mistress, then the study door opened and in sailed Mrs. James. She was at least ten years younger than her husband and dressed in

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the latest style. Everything on her was expensive, from her smart shoes to her elegant hat. Her face was beautiful and she was fully conscious of that fact. She swept into the room with a regal air while my brother and I stood stiffly at attention. Two little brown Pekinese dogs went sniffing round the room and started to bark in shrill tones at the intruders.

"These are the two sons of our old friend Saint-Mandé," said the husband while we bowed, and the wife returned our salute rather stiffly. She eyed us keenly and said she was glad we had come to tea. Taking off her hat she displayed a mass of golden hair and drew attention to it by saying she hoped it was not untidy. Then she sat opposite us, crossed her legs and displayed a most shapely calf encased in fine silk. The maid brought in tea and we were told casually how valuable the china was. The cups were not much bigger than large thimbles, and I was so thirsty that I could have consumed a couple of pints of ale with ease. We balanced tiny plates on our knees and ate bread as thin as paper. Mrs. James was the dominant partner and her husband, whom she called Gordon, was obviously a badly henpecked man. She saw me looking at her legs with admiration, and I could see, from her change of tone, that I went up in her estimation. Duncan was interested in stamp-collecting and Gordon said he would show him some rare specimens after tea.

"Do you also collect stamps, Wilfred?" asked Alice (for such, it appeared, was the wife's name).

"No," I answered with a smile, "I'm afraid I haven't patience enough."

"Well, what is your hobby at present?"

"I really don't think I have one, unless it's reading."

"Splendid. Which are your favourite authors?"

"Do you mean novelists?"

"Yes."

"It is difficult to say. I am fond of all the leading English novelists, especially Fielding, Smollett, Sterne, Thackeray and Trollope."

"My favourites are Richardson, Scott and Dickens," beamed Alice; "what have you to say about them?"

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"It is so much a question of one's personal idiosyncrasies," I suggested. "The writers you name are undoubtedly outstanding craftsmen and well worthy of one's attention."

Alice was interested in modern poetry but appeared to know little about it. It seemed to me that she thought it gave her a certain *cachet* socially. She was incapable of discussing poetry but had an ornate collection of modern poets in her own room.

When tea was over conversation lagged, and Alice suggested that I should go to see her books, while Duncan went to inspect Gordon's stamps. I went with my guide and she took me to a kind of boudoir. It was an elegant apartment with a secretaire of highly polished red wood, two plush chairs and a couch. Bookshelves stood against the walls and the contents were bound in green leather. I was invited to be seated and watched the efforts of Mrs. James to find some poems of Chatterton. She found them eventually, and also de Vigny's play on the young poet who committed suicide.

"To think what he might have produced had he lived!" sighed my companion. "He was only seventeen and eight months when he died. Poor boy! How I would have liked to mother him and watch him produce great masterpieces! What do you think of de Vigny's play?"

"I rather think that Alfred de Vigny let his heart run away with his head."

"Oh, you are hard on the poor boy," cried Alice, bringing me some photographs to inspect. She was standing so near me that the perfume from her body troubled me, and, after a few minutes, she touched my hands while showing the pictures.

I was very closely inspecting a picture of the temptress in an abbreviated bathing dress when she suddenly exclaimed: "O dear, what a nuisance! A bit of grit has gone in my eye." It is a classic dodge, and I at once thought of the picture at home of Uncle Toby and Widow Wadman. Alice sat on the couch and clutched my arm when the pain was severe. Not a trace of grit could I see, and at length had to confess my inability to remove whatever was causing the trouble. Alice took an interest

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in my scars and passed her soft fingers over my ear, jaw and forehead. The desire to take her in my arms and crush her lips with kisses was becoming irresistible, for I was sitting at her side on the couch, and her legs were touching mine. When she knelt to show me a picture behind her on the wall I rested my hand on her shoulder to get nearer the picture, and as she did not object, let it drop to her slim waist, which I clasped with some trepidation.

When all the details of the group had been pointed out, Alice gave me a chaste kiss on the brow and said: "Come along, we must not be naughty to-day."

Gordon and Duncan were in the study when we returned thither, and I announced that we had better think of going as it was getting late. The parson tried to persuade us to go with them to the evening service, but Alice said she had had enough church for one day, and would drive us home. Before leaving we inspected the garden and admired the way it was kept. Gordon kept quoting from a poet called Brown of whom I had read nothing; one of the trifles remained in my mind:

"A garden is a lovesome thing, God wot!  
Rose plot,  
Fringed pool,  
Fern'd grot—"

I watched a big fat Persian cat crunching the bleeding body of a bird that a few seconds before had been pouring out its joyous song, and wondered what the fluttering songster would say to the suggestion that a beneficent Deity was ordering all things. I thought, too, of the best and bravest shooting at each other in the foul holes at the front, and wondered why the sleek parson should enjoy such peace and beauty and plenty. He did his bit by taking some services at the camps, and no doubt passed as a very patriotic, noble-minded cleric, one of the sort who make religion a thing of up-to-date value.

Alice took us to the paddock behind the house, and I caught the handsome roan mare that grazed peacefully there. A blue dog-cart with slender yellow lines stood outside the

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stable with the shafts propped up. I quickly harnessed the animal and we climbed in, after thanking the smiling parson, who was thinking of his evening oration, for he walked about by himself muttering and emphasizing points with his hands. Alice asked me if I would like to drive and I accepted the invitation.

We sat quite close together and I was rather proud of the high-stepping horse and my smartly dressed companion. We passed hundreds of soldiers going into town from camp. They walked aimlessly about the streets, trying to forget camp life by looking at shop windows or following girls. When we approached Duncan's camp he said he would have to go, as he was on guard that evening. I arranged to meet him during the week and drove off.

"Who will help you to put the horse and cart away when you get back?" I asked Alice.

"I suppose I shall have to do it myself as both the stable-boy and my husband will be out. There is usually a meeting after the service, and he always returns home late, for he stays gossiping with some old cronies."

"Can I come with you and put the things away? The walk back to camp is only half an hour, and that is nothing to a soldier accustomed to long route marches."

"It's awfully kind of you, if you are sure you don't mind," gushed the beautiful woman at my side, giving my arm a little pinch.

"Do you mind if we go for a little drive or do you wish to go home at once?" I asked.

"A little drive would be rather jolly, but we mustn't be late for it is so much more comfortable at home; I did not intend to stay out and have only a thin frock."

We drove home in a leisurely manner following a different road. As soon as I had put the horse in the field we went indoors and the whisky was brought out. A stiff tot made the blood tingle in my veins, and when Alice insisted that I should have another it seemed to me that she was anxious to make me fuddled, for each drink was half a glass. Alice went away and when she returned was even more lightly clad than before. The evening was somewhat chilly and a fire had been lighted which made the room almost too

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warm. I watched the lady turning over the pages of a book of poetry and suddenly she started to read with passion in her voice a poem called "Love."

"Wilfred, what would the world be without love—I mean passionate, rapturous embraces?" she asked suddenly.

"Not worth living in," I replied fervently, rushing at her and crushing her in my arms. She kissed me with her hot soft lips and sat on my knees. Presently she heard the front door open and her husband's tread going into the study. Fortunately there was a back door near the boudoir and I slipped out in the deepening twilight. Half-way across the yard I remembered my cap and went back, hoping Alice had put it out. Sure enough it was on the door-step and I put it on, hoping that Gordon would suspect nothing.

Near the camp I met Snowy and as we walked along I started to laugh. "What the hell are you laughing at?" demanded Snowy, thinking perhaps that I was making fun of him. "Well," I replied, "I was just thinking of a story I heard the other day. A man was taking his wife to a dance when a message came that he was wanted on business in an adjoining town. 'I don't want to spoil your evening,' he said to his wife, 'you had better go to the dance alone.' As soon as he had gone she rang up a young spark who was rather keen on her, and he lost no time in coming round and taking her out for the evening. Before they parted she invited him in for a spot of whisky. While they were drinking and holding hands the front door opened, and in strode the husband. The young lover lost his head, and, dashing upstairs, hid under the bed, hoping to slip out when the occupants were asleep, but the fellow on the floor had to stay where he was all night. In the morning when the servant brought in tea on a tray the husband leant over the side, lifted up the valance, and said to the cowering interloper: "I say, old man, do you take sugar?"

"Why should you think of that now?" asked Snowy.

"Because," I replied, "it nearly happened to me."

Several dreary days followed. The hellish monotony of camp life got on my nerves so much that I longed to get away from it and pestered the M.O. to mark me fit. He

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made me undergo three long marches, six miles, ten and fifteen, before declaring me fit to go back to the depot. I spent the last night with Duncan. We were both rather down in the mouth at the thought of parting, with our futures so uncertain. After wandering about rather aimlessly we went to the one place where we could forget our troubles and got drunk as fiddlers. Next morning I marched to the station with fifty others *en route* to the draft depot in London. In one way the thought of returning to the front was not unpleasant. There one found action and the chance of another blighty; even extinction was preferable to the unbearable monotony of the remedial camp.

It was early when we reached the station but a number of people were there; most of them were wives and sweet-hearts of the men. Higher up in the train were officers, and their womenfolk were smartly attired, several had expensive furs.

"Ay, 'Arry, they're in the stalls, we're in the bloody gods," cried a private who took frequent swigs from a dark bottle. Most of us had been wounded two or three times and there was a constant flow of back-chat about conditions at the front. One man started to bellow:

"The bells of hell go ting-a-ling  
For you and not for me,"

and we all joined in the chorus. Many Cockney women had come up to be near their husbands and were dancing on the platform singing:

"Pack up yer troubles in yer old kit bag  
And smile, smile, smile."

I found myself trying to analyse my state of mind, and wondered why I was going back to the trenches so calmly, almost eagerly, after having been so desperately anxious to get away from them. It may have been that my whole being craved for excitement and action. Then again I was afraid to face the future, and the life at the front was so exacting and uncertain that one had little or no time to think about anything but the task in hand. In spite of my dislike of killing men I thirsted for adventure, and



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loathed the dismal drills and parades in English camps. The best men were in France, either under the sod or holding the line, and one felt proud to be with such men. Besides, the constant changes of sector in Flanders allowed us to speculate constantly about our future. At any time new orders might come in and one's future movements were always gloriously uncertain. Red-tape was less in evidence at the front, and even the front line was at times preferable to inspections and picking up papers round the huts and tents. During my last stay in the line I swore that wild horses would not drag me back if I once got away, but that was because I was so utterly weary that I craved for nothing but rest and sleep. The very thought of clean white sheets and unlimited sleep after lousy wet garments and constant alarms haunted one, but the novelty had already worn off ; and I had become fit again, so that marching for hours across the square and dodging parades began to pall.

The journey down to London was slow and we stopped at every station. As soon as the pubs opened we bought liquor and carried the bottles with us. The compartments were strewn with the remains of our food and the closets were choked. We howled, sang, fought, and gambled the whole of that day. One man was quiet. He had four wound-stripes and could not have been more than twenty. I looked at his book and saw that he was reading :

"A Tryst with Death.  
I am footsore and very weary,  
But I travel to meet a friend :  
The way is long and dreary,  
But I know that it soon must end."

"Why the hell are you reading such dismal stuff?" I demanded, slapping him on the shoulder with the bonhomie that comes of a bottle of whisky.

"They are going to get me this time, I can feel it in my bones," he replied with a smile. "Four times have they hit me and next time it will be the quietus."

"What a cheerful b——," cried a fellow on the opposite bench. "Take a pull at this, man, and you won't talk like that."

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The bottle was passed over and the despondent one took a good drink, after which he forgot his troubles and played cards.

It was late in the evening when we steamed into London and some men slipped off home. I was informed that our destination was in the South-Eastern district, and we marched every inch of the way. There were trains, trams, and buses, but the authorities no doubt thought the exercise would do us good. Rain started to fall long before we reached the camp, and as we had packed our coats we got thoroughly wet. People were rushing to cinemas and theatres, boys shouted the latest war news and we hailed them with jocular cries:

"What bloody war is that, mate?"

"Is that the Great War?"

"Do you mean the war for freedom, the war to end war and make the world safe for democracy?"

The hoardings announced that the Germans had no more men, certain quidnuncs had proved it to their entire satisfaction.

The bustle of a large city has always fascinated me. I love to stand at a corner or sit outside a café watching the passing throngs and wondering what each person thinks of life. Some rush to meet lovers, others to fetch the doctor or undertaker. There is nothing more interesting than the teeming pulsating life of any great metropolis. The history of any obscure member of the crowd would be more thrilling than any novel or play. Romance must have entered into their lives at some time or other. Mr. John Buchan's definition of romance: "Something in life which happens with an exquisite fitness, a splendid finality; as if Fate had suddenly turned artist—something which catches the breath because it is so wholly right," surely even the very poorest had experienced romance at some time, in their lives, like the faint winter sun that breaks through the clouds for a brief space on a dreary day.

We were halted at the side of the road while the officer in charge disappeared, having probably gone for a drink. The sergeant stood under the blind of a shop which oddly enough was full of artificial limbs and skeletons:

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"Better order yer wooden leg, Bill," yelled one.

"Is that where yer got yer bloody wooden 'ead?" replied Bill who was in a bad temper for the rain was going down his neck. I waited until the sergeant had turned his back and, taking two of my companions with me, I hurried round the corner looking for a pub. Sure enough there was one fifty yards away and we rushed in. The officer was in the lounge so we went to the bar, and had three pints each before rejoining the main body. Most of the men cursed like blazes, for there was no sense in making them stand in the rain. The passing crowds did not even turn their heads to look at us. Three years earlier they cheered and fêted the gallant lads who were going to fight for the honour and glory of England. The war had lasted too long, except for profiteers and munition workers. I reflected with some bitterness that we were going overseas to fight and probably lose our lives for these people who would not even look at us. My mind went back to a Sunday evening in Lanshore when a girl, wrapped in the Union Jack, sang a patriotic song about our King and our Country both wanting us so much and they would love us and kiss us when we came back again.

After we had threatened to clear off, the N.C.O. went and brought the officer from the pub and we set off. The camp was reached at midnight or a little after. The sergeant-major was anxious to impress on us that we were no longer at a remedial camp and cursed us for lounging and slouching, as if we ought to have been smart and lively after a day in the train, and four hours' march through London including a long wait in the rain. While the S.M. was bawling at us in the dark somebody shouted: "Shut yer gap, you bloody fool!" The great man looked as if he was going to burst, gasped and rushed among us pushing and jostling to find "the bastard" who had insulted him. In a few minutes we had knocked him down and kicked him in the mud, where he lay howling for mercy and calling for help.

Next day we were all under arrest and in due course appeared before the commanding officer. All denied having taken part in the assault, but all maintained that the S.M.

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richly deserved what he got. He had never been to France or to any front, and had earned a reputation as a bully. My companions asked me to put their case before the C.O. and I did so, pointing out that men who had been wounded several times were not going to put up with bullying from a hound who had never smelt powder, and who thought he could push and hustle them while calling them bastards, a word the soldier hates more than any other.

However, discipline had to be maintained, and we were given two hours' pack drill every evening for a week. I did mine once and then paid another man to take my place. That fellow had got into trouble with the civilian police and was expecting them to come looking for him at the camp. He thought that if he were doing pack drill under my name when they arrived he would stand less chance of being spotted. I hated the drill because it was such a stupid waste of time, and the last few evenings in London were precious.

The next day I was informed that I was booked for Salisbury Plain. We joined a company consisting entirely of conscripts who were doing their best to avoid going overseas. The group from the last camp stuck together, and in the evenings we walked to Salisbury, which was about ten miles away. There we spent the evenings in pubs and some went after women. Each day we discussed the position, and finished up by marching to the captain in a body and asking to be sent back to our own battalion in France. Our leader was a big sergeant who had served in the Guards and had roughed it in most parts of the world. The captain said :

" Well, sergeant, what can I do for you ? "

" We want to return to our own battalion in France, sir. "

" Your reasons ? "

" The main one is that we are fed-up playing at soldiering here with conscripts, whose chief concern is avoiding the real thing. "

" It may be boring here, but it's safe, you know. "

" It's no use, sir, we're fed up to the back teeth, and if we have to stay there may be trouble, for these men refuse to take orders from conscripts with a few weeks' service. "

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The captain was a fat, middle-aged chap, who looked as if he might have been a successful business man before he was called up. He had no ribbons or wound stripes and looked what he was, a fat epicure in uniform. The upshot was that we were granted seven days' leave, after which we were to proceed overseas. The last night in that camp was a memorable one. A crowd of Australians came to gamble and we played all night with blankets over the windows. When day dawned I had won twenty-five pounds, mostly at banker and pontoon.

On arrival in London I went home and told them the news. They were aghast, for they had thought my fighting days were over. I tried to cheer them up by assuring them that the war could not possibly last much longer, but I had said the same thing before and they refused to be comforted. I sent a message to Daphne but received no reply. The maid said she was in Scotland with Major Smithers. I had never heard of Smithers, but wished him luck and rang up Stella. She was very much at home and we met the same afternoon. As she was running a hospital she was allowed petrol for her car, and we decided to take a run down to Oxford. It was a gorgeous day with a nip in the air, for it was the end of October. Leaves strewn the country roads and were sent scurrying along by the wind. It was evening when we reached the old university city. The night was a dream of delight. Before turning in we took a walk and followed the river for a mile or so. Returning through Carfax we saw a man preaching. He was old and tall; his white locks fluttered in the wind. A small group stood round him, looking cold and miserable.

When we returned to the hotel we sat in the lounge watching the antics of a number of soldiers who were cadets in the Flying Corps. They were kicking up what the troops call hell's delight. When the singers went we retired to our comfortable, well-furnished room, overlooking the street. I took Stella on my knees and we sat by the fire hugging and kissing. After a little talk she put her legs round the chair, leant back and touched the floor with her hands. I was amazed at her suppleness and was given further evidence of her skill and strength when she walked on her hands and

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picked up a handkerchief with her teeth. Her body was a perfect combination of strength, grace and beauty. She could place her hands flat on the floor without bending her knees, and then stand on her hands by kicking her feet into the air. I was rather proud of my strength and strove to do the same tricks. After many efforts I succeeded, but was slow and clumsy in comparison. It was like an elephant trying to be as graceful as a deer.

We rose late and motored to some of the charming old villages round the city, visited hoary churches and had tea in a quaint inn. Those happy days passed all too quickly, and on the Monday morning at six, I, with about a hundred others, caught the train for Folkestone. We reached the coast at noon and could not sail before dark. That meant we had to wander about the beach, a portion of which had been wired off so that we could not run away; it was like being in a concentration camp. We had a good feed in the canteen, then played cards and smoked until darkness fell and we marched on board the transport.

## CHAPTER XXIV

WE detrained at a rail-head and marched fifteen miles to the billets. I was posted to a different company and found myself surrounded by a sea of new faces. Winter had set in and rain fell in torrents. The parade ground was a sea of mud, and I began to curse my folly for coming back to such a hole. Rumours were going round that a big attack was to take place near Poelcapelle and Paschendaele.

The day after my arrival the report was confirmed, and the general expressed the hope that we would add fresh lustre to the regimental glory. Our billets were barns six miles behind the trenches, and rain came through the roof, which leaked like a sieve. We lay on the wet straw over which was a layer of cow-dung, and tried to keep dry by wrapping our ground sheets round us. I mucked in with a big raw-boned Cockney. He was as lousy as a hen, and in a few hours, hordes of his lice were crawling over me. At night we were too cold to sleep; most of the time was spent scratching and twisting in an attempt to get comfortable. In the middle of the night I got up, determined to secure more warmth or perish in the attempt. The Cockney came with me and we raided a billet in the villages half a mile away, and stole four blankets. With those round us we were warm enough, but would have to dump them as soon as we went into action. The stink from the manure pit was vile and we ate our food with filthy hands because there was no water for washing.

Next day I went with about twenty others from the company on grave-digging fatigues. It was expected that the casualties would be heavy, and we marched to a spot where the ground was soft, and dug hundreds of graves. It was a gruesome job, like digging graves in a prison for

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condemned men. We laughed and joked to keep our spirits up, for each of us secretly hoped that we would be spared.

A newspaper reached me and I read the speeches in Parliament with some interest. When I wrote home I commented on what I had read, and forgot all about it until, after the war, I came upon some old letters my mother had kept, and read the following :

*Dear Mother and Father,*

*I see in the paper you sent that Lord xxxxx says he thinks the xxxx xxx xx xxxx xxx xxxxx. I hope he is right for we are xxxx xx xxx xxxxxx xxxxxxxx.*

And so the letter went on with so much obliterated that what remained was unintelligible. The addle-brained censor thought it dangerous for me to reproduce what had already been in every paper in the land !

Next day we were warned for fatigues up the line. We marched to a dump in the middle of a wilderness of mud, old trenches and smashed trees. There we were given sand-bags, wire, boards and heavy bundles of corrugated iron sheets. Some carried picks and shovels, ten per man. We toiled all night in the trenches half full of water and, just before dawn, when rain was coming down in sheets, ten of us were sent to bury a crowd of dead who had been sent down during the night. There was no parson, not that we wanted one, and we threw the bodies into the freshly dug graves. Some had been killed by clean bullet wounds and were not much disfigured. Others were smashed up by shells and were broken beyond recognition, and in spite of the *rigor mortis* one could feel that all the bones were broken. A foot of water had collected at the bottom of the graves and the corpses splashed when they reached the bottom. I recalled an elaborate funeral I had seen in England, and thought that when my turn came I would much prefer the soldier's burial in an old blanket with muddy boots on my feet, and no black priest, vulture-like, hovering round prating of heaven and hell.

Next morning I had scraped off some of the mud that covered me from head to foot, and was preparing to shave when the captain's servant came, with the information that



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the company commander wished to see me. Captain Ewen was reputed to be six feet five inches, and he was one of the few men who made my six feet plus appear quite ordinary. He rarely spoke and was one of the strong, silent men who possess tremendous strength of will and character. Whenever I think of Ewen I think of what Carlyle said in "The Hero as King": "The great *silent* men! Looking round on the noisy inanity of the world, words with little meaning, actions with little worth, one loves to reflect on the great empire of *Silence*. The noble silent men . . . they are the salt of the earth." One sees idiotic imitations of strong silent men on the films, they resemble the real article as much as cheap paste resembles real pearls or diamonds; they deceive only the ignorant and foolish.

When I reached the hut I entered, saluted, and stood at attention.

"I have sent for you, Saint-Mandé, to inform you that I have decided to promote you to corporal. I suppose you would rather be an N.C.O. than a private?"

"No, sir, I would rather be a private."

"I suppose you have good reasons for your attitude?"

"Perhaps others wouldn't consider them good, they're mainly sentimental."

"Isn't it galling to your pride to be in the lowest rank?"

"No, sir, I am proud of it. The humble private is the man who, without any pretensions, gets the job done, and will win the war if it can be won. He gets far less comfort than the officers or N.C.O.s and has to put up with merry hell when anyone over him happens to be a swine. The truth is, I like the freemasonry that exists among privates, and which I should imagine is not found among other ranks to the same extent. Besides, one has often to demand the impossible of men and curse them when they are completely exhausted. I don't like doing that to fellow-men, however necessary it may be."

"Your attitude is refreshing, for usually those who seek promotion are ready to crawl on their hands and knees to get it. There is a private in the company who pesters me every other day to recommend him for a commission. He has what he calls 'the qualification,' by which he

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means the matriculation certificate, although he is no more fitted to be an officer than my batman. You are the oldest man in the company in point of service and have by far the best record. I would be prepared to recommend you for a commission if you wish to apply. Meanwhile I am giving you corporal's rank as we are short of N.C.O.s and, much as I appreciate your modesty, I cannot allow you to dodge your obligations. Of course you can get drunk or do something that will entail forfeiture or your stripes, but I hope you won't. Don't forget there's such a thing as *noblesse oblige*."

I saluted and withdrew to break the sad news to my pals.

In the afternoon the mail came and my heart jumped when I saw a thick letter in Jean's handwriting. I pushed it into my pocket, hoping those near me would not notice my emotion. There were some other letters and cards, but of no importance. Before I was able to read Jean's message I received an order to go to Bois-Vert, a small town ten miles west, with an urgent message. At the same time I requested and obtained leave to spend the evening in the town, so that there was no need to hurry. I took a horse and reached my destination in less than an hour.

As soon as the message was delivered I found a little secluded inn and went in. The room was warm and the air redolent of wine and tobacco smoke. A couple of old men whose hands trembled when they lit their pipes, were sitting nearly touching the big stove in the middle of the room. Ordering a good meal and a bottle of wine I went and gave my horse water and food. When I returned there was a clean cloth on the table, a big heap of brown chipped potatoes, six eggs, a big dark loaf and the wine. Madame was a quiet fat woman of medium height with a placid expression. I did not want them to watch me reading Jean's letter so I stuck an old copy of the *Pétit Parisien* against the cruet-stand and read the letter unseen.

It ran as follows :

*I am full of anguish for the great wrong I have done you. Can you ever forgive me, darling? For a long time I thought my love was only infatuation, and that there was*

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something wrong in it, owing to the strange way we met. I sought forgetfulness in a whirl of gaiety which did nothing but convince me of the inanity of what passes for amusement in the eyes of society. Try as I would I could not forget you and when I came to see you in hospital I realized how deeply I cared.

Then the sight of your poor torn face was too much for me. I was weak and foolish. Instead of feeling proud of you for having been so brave, and sacrificing your looks for your country, I allowed my weakness to overcome me, and again tried to put you out of my mind. Your photograph was in all the papers and magazines and films. The more I studied it the more I realized how silly I had been, and that true love cannot be shaken by disfigurement.

The only true happiness I have ever known has been with you; we have the same opinions, tastes and inclinations. When you look into my eyes I feel a thrill nothing else can give, and am now terrified at the thought that it may be too late, that your feelings may have changed. If they have I shall die, for life without you would not be worth living. What can I say? How can I convince you of the depth of my affection, of the intensity of my longing for you?

O Wilfred, you must know how real my love is, for otherwise I could never write a letter like this. When I walk alone and see any beautiful sight, a sunset beyond the hills where the road winds through pleasant pastures, a tiny ivy-covered cottage with a cosy hearth within, moonlight on a frosty night when the bare branches of the trees scintillate with a thousand gems, the laughter of happy children, a white sail on foam-tipped waters, the glorious leafy lanes with a touch of frost in the air, and the leaves crackling underfoot . . . then I want to share my joy with you, to feel you at my side, the touch of your hand, and realize that we both feel intensely the beauty of life and are both equally thrilled by it.

Every moment with you was full of experiences quietly beautiful, every moment was full of ecstasy. The first time we met I felt at once that something new and wonderful had entered into my life, that before it was poor and incomplete, meaningless and colourless. I had never had any intense emotion and the realization of what you meant to me took my

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*breath away. I was intoxicated by the happiness that entered my heart, and incapable of doing anything but think of you, and when I closed my eyes your face was before me as clear as if you had actually been in the room. I wondered why I had been so singularly fortunate and thanked God for your love.*

*My father was harsh and inflexible, he did all in his power to turn me against you and succeeded only too well, for I was young and inexperienced. He had done such a lot for me and I thought he must be right. Old friends of the family urged me to fall in with his wishes and I feared that if I refused his health would suffer. Now he is dead I feel I was wrong to give way, and am beside myself with grief lest it be too late. When I wrote that I was having a gay time I lied, for it was all dust and ashes. Even as I wrote I yearned for you and my heart was breaking at the pain I was causing you. I lay awake at night and thought of you in danger and horrible discomfort. On wet stormy nights when the rain beats against the windows and the wind moans in the trees I cannot sleep, for my love makes me share your trials.*

*O Wilfred, when you receive my letter I hope you will answer quickly so that I may know my fate. The joy of being loved by you and sharing your life seems too wonderful. What can I do to prove myself worthy of you? Until your letter comes my heart will be full of anxiety.*

The letter went on in the same strain for ten pages and when I read it I was so happy that I could not think coherently. To marry Jean and live with her was such a wonderful dream that all else seemed petty and foolish in comparison. At first I had been attracted by her physical charms but soon discovered that the charm of her manner was equally seductive. Her laugh was the most delightful music and she was incapable of any meanness. When I had thought that she no longer cared I accepted the position with philosophic resignation, for she seemed too wonderful for me. I was magnanimous enough to hope that she would marry some man who would prove worthy of her and make her happy. I was so excited that I ordered more wine, and treated the two old companions, until they

laughed and chuckled with glee. Even the staid dame in charge condescended to take a glass and drink my health. We all touched glasses and pledged each other.

The field post-office was shut but I found the sergeant in charge, and gave him a telegram to send off next morning. I wanted Jean to know as soon as possible that I had received her letter and that, in spite of all that had happened, my love was as strong as before. I had been with other women from whom I had obtained a satisfaction that was purely physical. With all I had realized very clearly that life with them would have been too dreary to contemplate, once the urge of passion had worn off. With Jean I had such a community of tastes, ideas, and interests, that we were happy together, quite apart from any sex appeal.

Next day I wrote a letter that must have contained over twenty pages and posted it in a green envelope.

The day following I went with Captain Ewen to visit the trenches we were going to take over. It was a lugubrious region, bare, blasted, God-forsaken, and depressing enough to damp the spirits of the stoutest. We went into an artillery observation post which was in a tree close to the front line. An iron ladder had been fastened to the trunk on our side, and about twenty feet from the ground where the trunk forked was a thick steel shield with a slit through which we peeped. From time to time a bullet struck the metal with a sharp ping and glanced off. There was enough room for four people behind the shield, for the tree was a monster with a diameter of about four feet where the two huge limbs broke away from the main trunk. A small platform had been constructed and we crouched on it. In addition to Captain Ewen and I, there were a battery commander and his signaller.

About a mile behind the German front line we spotted a large working party and the artillery captain gave his guns the angle and range. In a few seconds salvoes were hurtling overhead and corrections were hastily sent back. It was an eighteen-pounder battery firing shrapnel, and, after a few corrections, the shells were bursting over the heads of the unfortunate Germans who ran in all directions.

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We could see through our powerful glasses that many had been knocked out and lay huddled up. The artillery commander was as happy as a lark at the good shooting, and would have danced for joy had the platform been big enough. After a few minutes some of the Jerries came back but were again scattered.

It was a little after noon and the day, although cold, was clear. When the R.F.A. observer was going, an officer came from the R.G.A. and looked for a good target. His guns were sixty-pounders and I was anxious to see their effect. There was a village about two thousand yards from our post and although most of the houses were in ruins a big farm was almost intact. Messengers came and went; it was a headquarters of some kind and a most desirable target. One gun ranged on it, and the first shell dropped about seventy yards short. The next was about twenty-five over, and the third went clean through the roof. All the guns were then brought to bear and the heavy shells crashed through the roof and walls of the stricken farm. Men ran out and scattered about the fields. After several hits the structure took fire and great flames enveloped it. It needed but little imagination to visualize the wounded crying for help in the middle of the furnace, while the hungry flames leapt, roared and crept nearer, until the heat was unbearable. I watched the walls totter and collapse; the thatched roof dropped, blazing fiercely in a shower of sparks. Men came from all directions with buckets and fire-fighting appliances. The officer directing the firing of the sixty-pounders stopped until the crowd round the smouldering ruins was very dense, then he called up another battery in addition to his own, and had twelve guns firing as hard as they could. Shells were bursting with such rapidity that the Germans were caught like rats in a trap, and I saw whole groups blown to smithereens.

The R.G.A. captain grunted with satisfaction, and exclaimed with delight: "Bloody good shooting. That was the brigade H.Q. and very few came out. Damn good day's work, eh?"

I thought of the women and children who would be notified that their husbands and fathers had been killed

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and I found it hard to enthuse. My compassion was cut short by a perfect hail of shells from the German guns. They were probably well aware that the firing had been directed from the tree, and they tried their best to demolish it. Shells of every calibre whined, screamed and roared at us, until I thought it impossible to escape. Bullets rattled on our shield and one caught the telephonist who was peeping at the enemy lines. He was a plucky youngster, not more than nineteen, with the ribbon of the Military Medal. He was hit between the eyes and fell from the tree like a sack of corn. One shell, fortunately from a field piece, struck the tree a glancing blow and shook it like a straw. If a big shell had hit it we would all have been blown sky high; but our luck was in that day. The ground all round was pock-marked, but the old trunk still stood erect. It was enough to terrify the bravest when salvos came hurtling at us and we realized that many guns were concentrating on our destruction.

We waited until darkness fell. Wintry days in Flanders are short and in the deepening dusk we made good our escape. The ground all round the tree resembled a ploughed field with enormous craters instead of furrows. A few days later, when I revisited the spot, the tree was lying in pieces on the ground and two wooden crosses, somewhat awry, marked the graves of an officer and telephonist. I was on the point of turning away when I saw a rough cross that had been flattened in the mud. It bore the inscription in blue pencil: "Here lies the body of Signaller T. B. Daimler, — Battery R.G.A.," and underneath his name were the letters M.M.

When I got to know Captain Ewen I realized he was the finest type of officer one could possibly find in any army. He reminded me of de Vigny's Capitaine Renaud in "Servitude et Grandeur Militaire." As I have said, he was very tall, and looked every inch a soldier. His face was handsome and serious. Early in the campaign a bullet had grazed his chin and had left a deep furrow which changed colour in cold weather. His manner was gentle and he never raised his voice. He was most considerate to his men and they would do anything for him. On more than

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one occasion he had risked a court-martial by refusing to throw away lives needlessly, but had gained his point in the end. He was about fifty years of age and his hair was almost white. Responsibility had lined his face and given him a preoccupied air. He had been in several wars and wore the D.S.O. and M.C. ribbons. The men said he could have secured promotion many times, but did not wish to leave the company. He was a cultured man and extremely well read.

One day he sent me to his dug-out for a book, and I found that it was the "*Religio Medici*" by Thomas Browne. When I read it after the war it captivated me. Most people must have thought that Captain Ewen was cold, for he was most reserved and rarely spoke, although his politeness even with fools was very marked. I only once saw him angry, and he was terrible. A young officer had caused several men to lose their lives through not getting them under cover when hostile aircraft were overhead. Ewen did not know I could hear from my dug-out, and lashed the incompetent subordinate with biting invective. Next day the subaltern disappeared, having been transferred to some other unit. Most men try to impress by boasting, but Ewen impressed without seeking to do so. He had been at the front since Mons, with the exception of two or three stays in hospital as a result of wounds. He never lost courage and was as inspiring when things were going badly as when we were advancing. He never, as far as I know, discussed politics. One day after the war, we met in London and he was minus a leg, although the artificial limb was so well made that he limped only slightly. He came to spend a week with Jean and me. Then I discovered his views on life; however, I must not anticipate. I can think of no better description of Captain Ewen than that contained in "*Short Studies in Great Subjects*" by Froude, when he says: "Most of us, at one time or other of our lives, have known something of love—of that only pure love in which no *self* is left remaining . . . some of us have learnt to love a cause, a faithful country; surely there is a love which exults in the power of self-abandonment, and can glory in the privilege of



suffering for what is good. '*Que mon nom soit flétri, pourvu que la France soit libre,*' said Danton; and those wild patriots who had trampled into scorn the faith in an immortal life in which they would be rewarded for what they were suffering, went to their graves as beds, for the dream of a people's liberty."

Captain Ewen served his country with the devotion that a lover feels for his mistress. He had never married, for family ties might make the task harder. He never questioned whether one country or another was to blame for the cataclysm that had overwhelmed Europe. His business was to fight, and, although he refused to expose his men needlessly, his record at Ypres and on the Somme, as well as in a score of other places, proved that when the occasion demanded sacrifices he was ready to make them. One day when I had to some extent won his confidence he smiled at my attempts to explain my philosophy of life. Then he said gravely with a charming smile:

"Saint-Mandé, you are young and think the world can be put right by reason. Somebody said that if a young man is not a revolutionary he has no heart, and if an old man is not a conservative he has no head. I have long ago come to the conclusion that ultimate truth eludes us and that we can never probe the secrets of the universe. All our accepted notions of right and wrong fall away if we examine them critically enough. We have gradually evolved a code of honour which is our only sheet-anchor, and in the chaos that threatens modern societies the soldier's self-abnegation is something very real and, it seems to me, very noble."

We spent several days drilling, and were made up to strength by a big batch of recruits. I met a man named Tomlyn who had been in most of the big battles and had just returned from hospital. He was also a public school boy of my own age, and had become as profane and devil-may-care as any old soldier. The night before we went into the trenches Tomlyn and I went to an *estaminet* in a village about six miles away. The room was full of soldiers shouting and drinking; the air was thick with smoke. We found a quiet corner and soon were in posses-

sion of two bottles of cognac, obtained by bribery. Tomlyn was a good-looking fellow of medium height, well built, with broad shoulders. He had refused a commission, for he considered life in the ranks better fun in spite of the greater hardships. All his friends and relatives in the army were officers, therefore it was a kind of inverted distinction to be a full-blown private.

At the next table a group of men were playing Crown and Anchor. The rascal running it had all the usual patter and enjoined his comrades to "chuck it dahn fick an' 'evy." Tomlyn told a number of stories, one of which, I think, merits reproduction. A big-mouthed, tub-thumping, empty-headed politician had been elected mayor of the town unfortunate enough to harbour him, and a banquet was given in his honour. Full of wine and optimism Tim Hooley got up to make a speech and spoke as follows: "Ladies and gentlemen, it is a great pleasure for me to be here this evening and to be the guest of honour. I do not wish to boast, but perhaps you will allow me to say a few words that will encourage the young men of the town to follow in my footsteps. As a boy I 'ad no influence and 'ad to start at the very bottom of the ladder. I got a job boiling tea cans for navvies; they called me 'Ooley. By dint of loyalty, perseverance, zeal and punctuality, I soon earned promotion and became a navvy's helper and was called Tim 'Ooley. By 'ard work I was soon promoted again an' became a fully qualified navvy; then they called me Timothy 'Ooley. Further promotion came my way and I was made foreman; then they called me Mr. 'Ooley. Seeking further scope for my talents I went in for politics and was made a town councillor; then they called me Timothy 'Ooley, Esq. When I later on became a magistrate it was Timothy 'Ooley, Esq., J.P. Now that I have become mayor I really don't know where it is going to end; for last Sunday when I walked into church the people all stood up and started to sing: 'Ooley, Ooley, Ooley, Lord God Almighty.'"

In a corner of the bar was a basket of fish and, judging by the smell, the contents were anything but fresh. Two of the soldiers started an argument, which ended by one

challenging the other to a duel with fish. They picked up two specimens, about five pounds each. Waving them and swinging them round they hit each other some hefty smacks and a number of their pals joined in. Soon the bar was full of flying fish and one knocked a row of bottles off the shelf. A row of buckets stood against the wall; they were full of distemper, red, blue and yellow. The roysterers grabbed the buckets and fought with the contents until they resembled harlequins, while the woman in charge rushed about the bar trying to restore order.

One of the soldiers had been a travelling showman and got on a table to perform his tricks. The first was sword-swallowing with a bayonet. He looked up at the ceiling and rather gingerly stuck the bayonet down his throat until only the handle was visible. The point must have been touching his supper. Then he did a fire-eating trick. It is as old as the hills but mystified most of the men. Some cotton-wool was soaked in petrol and placed in a short tube through which the performer blew. Long flames roared out and made the audience jump back. At the end of the performance the showman challenged anybody to tie him up so that he could not escape. An ex-sailor took him on and tied him up so effectively that he roared with pain and could no more release himself than fly. Tomlyn and I left when the showman's backers started fighting with the sailor's partisans. On our way back to billets we passed a wretched girl who informed us that her child was ill and hungry and that she wanted five francs. Her face was pale with dark lines under the eyes. We gave her some money to get rid of her and saw her accost some soldiers behind us.

Next day we were roused long before daylight and found a long line of lorries waiting on the road. All kinds of rumours were in the air. Some men said the Germans had broken through and were advancing towards the sea; others that they were on the run and we had to stop them digging in again. We crowded in, twenty to each lorry, and were soon rattling over the *pavé* that made rest impossible. Our rifles and equipment took up so much room that we could not lie down. Every pot-hole made the

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lorry jump, and threw us up in the air. Our conveyance was covered in, but most of them were open, and when the driving rain started the occupants were soaked. We made a considerable detour and passed through many villages that were quite undamaged. At noon we came in sight of the sea and climbed out of the vehicles on to the road. Our legs were so stiff we could hardly stand and I had pins and needles all up one side. The field kitchens were late but we got a hot meal of watery stew just before dark. A cold damp wind was blowing from the sea, and we were chilled to the bone. The drizzle soaked our coats and they hung and flapped round us like wet blankets with mud up to the middle. Tomlyn was in my section and we stood smoking and talking, until the order came that we were going into the trenches. It was then eight o'clock and a gale was blowing from the sea. We marched about ten miles over sand dunes and lost our way more than once. At two in the morning we found ourselves in a shallow trench not a hundred yards from the sea. In spite of the wet and cold I slept like a log, for I was completely exhausted.

When I woke at dawn the scene that confronted me was as depressing as anything I had ever seen. The land was low and marshy, with great pools in front and behind. The German trenches were about two hundred yards away behind thick wire. A thick mist hid everything beyond the German line, and the sea was black and menacing.

We had no dug-outs, simply holes scooped out in the wet earth. After a couple of days the rain stopped and the mist lifted. We were in a hell of a mess, soaked and plastered in mud. When the weather cleared we tried to dry our blankets, and scraped the mud from our boots and garments. A British monitor was firing on the enemy lines, and at each explosion great masses of wire, sand and other debris leapt high in the air. We ducked each time a big shell came flying over our heads, for some of them seemed to be coming right on top of us. After each burst pieces of steel, and even lumps of concrete from the German revetment, dropped all round us and made us keep low. One of the men in my section was a perky youth who had

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been in the stables at Newmarket. He had enlisted under age and would certainly have been rejected in peace time ; he could not have been more than five feet high. The others were in the habit of advising him to put dung in his boots so that he would grow. He retorted that he was little but good. When a shell dropped near, Titch would shout :

" If this keeps on some b—— will get 'urt," or " O muvver, I've forgot me chest-protector." At other times he would pretend he was writing a letter home and holding up the sheet of paper read as follows :

*Dear Mother,*

*This war is a bastard. If it keeps on some on us will get 'urt. 'Owever, we'll live in 'ope even if we die in despair. I've lost my 'ot-water bottle an' my body belt. The piles are better but now I've got the gripes. I am sending you five shillings.*

*P.S.—If you don't receive the five shillings you will know it has been stolen in the post.*

*P.P.S.—Have just had bad luck at banker, please send me ten shillings.*

We spent hours every day making drains and managed to keep the water at a reasonable level. After a week we were brought out and once again the lorries were awaiting us. We reached the old billets at dawn and wondered what game the High Command was playing at.

That evening we learnt that we were going into the trenches the following day, and the rumours of a big attack persisted. We pulled down beams from the roof of the barn and made a glorious fire that was so hot we had to sit well back from it. The straw dried and threatened to catch fire, so we heaped it up on one side, leaving a clear space round the brazier. The smoke was troublesome, so we hit holes in the plaster and lath walls. Titch had scrounged half a jar of rum, and it was enough to make the whole section drunk, with the help of two bottles of cognac that Tomlyn produced from some secret hiding-place. One man, who had been a tram conductor in Reading, was an expert mouth-organ player and we had a most

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enjoyable concert. Outside the wind howled and the rain came with the squalls, but we paid no heed. Warm and fuddled we sang "Thora," "Love's old sweet Song," "Swanee River," "Somewhere a Voice is calling," "Mother Machree," "When you come to the end of a Perfect Day," and "Genevieve," with feeling if not with restraint. The organ-player was solemn when sober, and had a perpetual grouse. He had been an active trade union worker and was too fond of "chewing the rag." It worried him that in the army one was never paid for overtime, and the right of free speech was, in public, at all events, done away with. But he was not a bad fellow in spite of his grouching, and I rather liked him. When he was slightly drunk he forgot his grievances and could be most entertaining. Then he would cuddle his mouth-organ and make it produce the most extraordinary variety of tunes. He could imitate anything from a violin to a full orchestra and, when I found out how talented he was, I gave him an extra drop of rum so that he would set to work and make the section forget their troubles.

One of the men picked up a newspaper in which (so he alleged) an Army Service Corps man extolled the virtues of some patent medicine. The writer had been run down as a result of war service, and the drug mentioned put him right. We cursed the A.S.C. and all other non-combatant corps in suitable language, and listened to another man, who read from a scrap of paper that the German losses had been enormous and so we need expect but little resistance when we next went over.

"D'yer believe that bloody rot?" cried Yates. "They've got more men than we 'ave, an' yer'll know it too when we go over the muckin' top. That tripe is for the public at 'ome, ter gull 'em so that they won't get down-'earted."

"All the same, they must 'ave lost a lot more than we 'ave," retorted a slow-witted youth from Weymouth.

"'Ow the 'ell do you know?" demanded a middle-aged man in the corner, whose whiskers made him look like a walrus. "I bet we lost more than them in the bloody Somme, for attackers always lose most."

"I wonder if they are as fed up about the muckin' war

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as we are," piped Titch. "'Tain't 'uman ter live like bloody 'ogs an' pretend we like it. All very well for them generals an' fellers who write for the papers to say the troops are determined to see it through an' are in 'igh spirits. Of course we sing sometimes when we march just because we are so bleedin' fed up that we would go balmy if we didn't. As if a feller feels 'appy marchin' in the rain, dog-tired, 'ungry, lookin' at the man's boots in front until yer bloody cock-eyed, an' then goin' over the top ter get hell knocked out of yer."

"O, shut yer bleedin' trap," cried Lance-corporal Ham, a big man from Bristol who drove a cart before enlisting. He had been wounded four times and had been in all the big shows. He knocked the ashes from his black pipe and continued: "If we was all like you, grousing like hell from morning till night, we wouldn't put up much of a show. Come on, my lucky lads, yer broke yer mothers' 'earts but yer won't break mine, who says a game o' banker?"

Those who had money started to play. Others dried wet cigarettes and started to tell yarns.

Next morning the mail came up and I received five letters from Jean. We did not move off until noon and I had ample time to read them. The outpouring of her love filled me with happiness, and I at once wrote a long letter telling her we were going into action but not to worry. I longed more than ever before for the end of the war, so that we could marry and settle in the cottage on the Downs that Jean had already selected. She was so anxious to prove that her love was as deep as before, and to make amends for having let me return to the trenches without seeing me or sending any message. In every letter she asked me if she were really forgiven and her intense joy was evident in every line. She wrote every day and sometimes I received six or more letters at once when the mail was irregular.

We paraded at two in the afternoon and marched towards the line. The first village we passed through was not badly damaged, although the church spire had been destroyed. In England pious folk fulminated against the Huns who fired on churches, completely oblivious of the

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fact that church steeples and spires were the finest observation-posts known, and of course we made full use of them. In one village there was a particularly high spire and our artillery observers were in permanent residence there. The curious fact was that every time the occupants climbed from the basement to the top of the spire, to get their guns on to some target, the Germans shelled the structure with great determination. Obviously there was a spy at work and the sleuths got busy. It was rumoured that a couple of villagers were shot on suspicion, but I am unable to vouch for that. In spite of all precautions the Germans knew exactly the movements of the observers, and gave them an anxious time before the spire collapsed under repeated hits. Quite by chance it was discovered that a number of rooks or similar birds had made their nests in the spire and flew out every time they were disturbed.

As we approached the line the landscape became ragged, forlorn, and repulsively ugly. One long village street illustrated in a short distance the progression from security to constant jeopardy. The house farthest from the trenches was but little damaged. It was a solid structure sheltered by a clump of trees. As we marched up the street the women and children grew more wretched and pathetic looking, the houses were more badly damaged, and the street was holed here and there. Half a mile past that village was a smaller one, and there all life had ceased; I mean civilian life, for there was a Red Cross station in a cellar, and what looked like a naval gun hidden in the ruined cottages. Each time it fired, the detonation hurt our ear-drums and the whole place trembled. Four men carried the shell on what looked like a stretcher, and the firing was done by means of a long lanyard. The recoil was terrific.

Then we entered the real danger zone, for shells started to burst near us and spent bullets dropped among us. It was as if we were entering a region that had been cursed, so that nothing would grow there. We avoided the road, for it was under direct observation, and the number of holes in it bore eloquent testimony to the accuracy of the German guns. Our path lay through swamps of yellow



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mud, seas of desolation. Broken rifles, gas-helmets, entrenching tools, dead horses, and wooden crosses, were like wreckage on the shore after a storm. At a thousand yards from the front line we entered a communication trench and lost sight of the surrounding country. Wounded came down fairly regularly, the bearers caked in mud and looking like huge moles. The slightly wounded smoked and smiled to us. Their faces were grey, unshaven and hollow. Most of the figures on the stretchers, however, lay still, ominously still, and the shapes of many showed they had been badly smashed. Blood dripped from some and the mud in the trench was stained at intervals where a man had been hit and bled to death. We stumbled and fell, often going down full length in the stinking slush. Steam rose from us in clouds and we mopped our brows. A sudden stop in front made us jostle each other and then our pent-up anger found release in fierce and resounding oaths. The man in front of me limped, for the poor devil had a skinned heel and was in pain. He refused to let us carry his rifle and pack until he was too exhausted to struggle on any farther. A group behind me started to croon :

" O madame, have you a daughter fine ?  
Parlez-vous ? (*both lines repeated*).  
O madame, have you a daughter fine,  
Fit for a soldier up the line,  
Inky pinky parlez-vous ? "

I was thinking of Jean and wondering what she was doing, when I felt a shell splinter hit my steel helmet with such force that I was knocked sideways. Had it not been for the steel protection over my cranium I should assuredly have been killed. The splinter was four inches long and tapered from an inch thick to a fine point. The edge was jagged and had punctured my helmet in three places. When I recovered my senses Tomlyn gave me the splinter and said : " Here you are, Saint-Mandé, a bloody good souvenir." I took the jagged piece of steel which was still hot and put it in my pocket. When we came out I sent it to Jean, and to-day it is a highly polished door-knocker, the sharp edges having been filed down.

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The front-line trench we took over was a shallow affair, knee-deep in water. The duck-boards floated and we wore long rubber boots. Some of the men took off their boots and socks, hung them round their necks, and paddled up and down like fishermen with shrimp nets. Instead of nets we had tins on the end of sticks and we baled incessantly. At one place of the trench one had to crawl on one's belly or run the risk of being sniped. I saw three men killed there in one day, and that prompted the section officer to stick up a notice with the following inscription:

"Three men stood up to chance their fate  
All in one day.  
They found out when it was too late  
It meant the devil to pay."

That officer was not more than nineteen and had come straight from a cadet school. Before that he had been at Eton and was the son of a big pot in the City. I liked him, for he had gumption enough to realize that he knew nothing and had to learn. He was very impressed by my ribbons and treated me with marked respect. It may have been partly due to the fact that I told Captain Ewen I would hold my stripes until some young and incompetent officer from home tried to teach me my duties. When I saw that the new officer was a gentleman and an intelligent fellow, I helped him all I could and he was duly grateful. A few days later I was promoted sergeant and became his right-hand man. He had never mixed with the plebs before and the men's swear words afforded him endless amusement. It was rather incongruous to hear his Eton voice say "Gorblimy," "O muck it," and "bastard."

Three days after we took over those trenches, he and I were standing near two men who were hard at work baling, and trying to drain a section of the ditch we occupied. One of the men was extremely pious. He said his prayers morning and evening, and rebuked his companions many times each day for their foul and blasphemous language. The other man was Titch, who swore with gusto, and in spite of his tender years, was steeped in vice. He feared neither God nor man and blasphemed at all hours. Sud-

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denly the holy man raised his head a few inches to ease his back, and, like the crack of a whip, a sniper's bullet went through his skull, as easily as through a sheet of paper. Poor "Holy Joe," as the men called him, sank down without a murmur, while a thin trickle of blood oozed from the side of his thick locks.

"You see, it sometimes pays to be short, sir," grinned Titch. "If 'e 'ad been as short as me that bullet wouldn't 'ave got 'im, would it, sir?"

The rising ground in front of us was dotted with shattered trees and the usual wreckage of war. Pill-boxes reared their ugly heads up, and the constant bark of machine-guns confirmed our fears that, when we had to go over, the resistance would be most desperate. The German sniper who made things so unpleasant for us was concealed in a tree; one could see his steel shelter through powerful glasses. A bunch of khaki uniforms round the foot of the tree showed that at least one attempt had been made to dislodge him. It was probable that a night patrol had reached the tree which was in No Man's Land, about fifty yards from the enemy trench, and a machine-gun had caught them. I suspected that the man in the tree had some means of communicating with the gun. Captain Ewen was discussing the matter with me when I suggested that the tree could easily be blown up. He replied: "Not as easily as you think. It is very solid and nothing short of a direct hit by a fairly big shell would bring it down."

I had noticed that the trunk was damaged near the base where a shell had scooped out a fairly big hole.

"Don't you think a charge in that hole near the base would do the trick, sir?" I ventured to suggest.

"Perhaps it would," he agreed, "but the last attempt was such a failure, owing to the gun trained on the base, that one doesn't want to throw away more men."

I was convinced the job could be done, and the daily toll of deaths from that rifle in the tree was getting on my nerves. One had to crawl and squat all day; a second's forgetfulness meant death. The platoon *moral* was very low and something was needed to improve it. After weighing up all the pros and cons I asked Captain Ewen

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for permission to do the job. He laughed and asked if I were mad.

"No, sir, I'm quite sane, at least I flatter myself that I am, and am so convinced that the rascal in that tree can be removed, that all I want is your permission to do the moving."

Ewen told me to go ahead, and, that night after dark, I crawled out with a thirty-pound bomb and a special time-fuse. Before I reached the tree my bomb seemed to weigh three hundred pounds and I had to rest every ten yards. When I was within a few yards of my objective I discovered a system of wires which would no doubt give the alarm when disturbed. I was afraid to cut them, for that might have also warned the watchers, so in the end I stepped gingerly over them, and lifted my bomb over without disturbing them. The dozen or so yards from the wire to the tree were the worst part of my journey, and to my joy, I remained as cool and collected as if blowing up snipers in trees was part of my everyday routine.

Realizing that to kick a tin or even to sneeze meant death, I moved like a phantom and made not the slightest sound. It was a very dark night and as I drew near the tree rain came down in torrents; that probably saved my life. When a Véry light came near I remained as motionless as a rock, hardly daring to breathe. My steel helmet had been left behind as I was afraid it would make a noise if it fell off or touched anything in passing. The corpses round the foot of the tree had started to decompose and the rats had already nibbled at their faces. They lay in the most grotesque attitudes with thick mud on their garments and boots. One man's hands were pressed against his head where he had been shot; another had a field dressing in his grip, but death had claimed him before he could use it.

The hole into which I intended sticking my bomb was a couple of feet deep, and had probably been made by an eighteen-pound shell from a field-gun. I breathed a sigh of relief when my bomb slipped into the cavity, and, with fingers that started to tremble, I fixed the fuse which was timed to burst the thing one minute after setting. What strange tricks the imagination plays on one! A

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score of times I was sure the man in the tree was taking aim to put a bullet through my skull, and every post became a German stalking me. When I began to crawl away from the bomb something fell on my bare head and I nearly died of fright; it was a hard rind of cheese! Without disturbing the wires I retreated a hundred yards or so from the tree before the explosion shook the ground. I saw the tree crash and fall in my direction.

A perfect hurricane of bullets came from the German lines and I crouched in my hole while the storm raged overhead. When it slackened I crept out and made for the sniper's post, which was now only about fifty yards distant. Fifty yards in No Man's Land at night often seemed like fifty miles, but I was determined to reach that man if at all possible. Speed was necessary as Jerry would probably send out a patrol to investigate, so I slithered along as fast as I could. The upper branches of the tree were shattered and impeded my progress, but I persevered until I stumbled on the steel tube in which the sniper had dwelt. It was not unlike a street letter-box, with a door on one side and a slit on the other. A ladder had connected it to the ground. The sniper was dead, having been killed by the fall. It was too dark to see his face clearly, but I did not intend leaving him there. His rifle was fitted with telescopic sights and had been slightly damaged. There was a seat and a shelf in the shelter and no bullet could pierce the sides.

I dragged the dead man and his rifle towards our trenches and lost my way several times. It took me nearly two hours to reach our front line, for they timed me. Captain Ewen was the first to congratulate me, and his firm handshake and fervent "Well done, Saint-Mandé, I'm proud of you," was worth all the medals in the world. I was like a drowned rat, soaked to the skin, and so covered with mud that it weighed me down. Ewen gave me a good drink of whisky and insisted on my going down to billets, where the Q.M.S. prepared a hot bath and gave me as much rum as I could drink. The news of my exploit was being noised abroad and was even mentioned in dispatches. My clothes were ruined as a result of my long crawl, and I was given

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a new rig-out. Next night I was again in the line, none the worse for my adventure.

An attack was to take place at dawn without artillery preparation, and we intended capturing the ridge behind the German trenches. We needed no ladders, for the trench was still very shallow. An hour before we were due to go over, I went round, shaking and kicking the men in the holes they had scraped out in the sides of the trench. I felt sorry for the rascals; it was like rousing condemned men for their execution. Some cursed, others yawned and the newer conscripts answered dutifully: "All right, sergeant."

The Germans were uneasy and swept our parapet at regular intervals. Just before dawn they put up a heavy barrage on our line and I suspected that one of our men who had deserted the night before had given the show away. We crouched down as the howling tornado of shells smashed in the sides of our trench and killed a number of men. One of the first to be hit was the young Eton lieutenant who stopped a piece of shell casing with his lungs. He was coughing and vomiting blood. I tried to make him comfortable, but he knew he was doomed. Pressing my hand he whispered: "My luck's out, Saint-Mandé. Carry on. Write to my people and say I didn't suffer much." He gasped once or twice and died.

The hail of steel showed no signs of slackening when we received the signal to go over. Some of the youngsters hesitated and I had to threaten them with my revolver. I shouted and cursed them, kicked one along the trench and over they went. The going was heavy and we fell down every few yards. I was the senior N.C.O. left in the platoon and managed to keep it together. By dropping flat now and again we had time to regain breath, and advanced in a series of rushes. Our numbers were thinning rapidly, but, when we reached the German line, we saw the defenders running down a communication trench. Progress was slow and difficult, for the mud was in places almost impassable. With a dozen men I rushed a pill-box that had been particularly troublesome, got round to the door at the back, and met the occupants, who came out with raised hands. The officer alone refused to surrender

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and tried to club me with the butt of his empty revolver. Tomlyn shot him through the head, and the prisoners hastened to give us all their possessions, assuring us that they were friends.

I made sure they had no weapons and set them to work carrying back our wounded; they were pathetically eager to do what I ordered, and, sending Titch with them, I collected the remainder of my men and pressed on. By ten o'clock we had reached our final objective on the ridge and set to work consolidating the crater in which we lay. I thought of the foolish officer whom Tomlyn had shot and wondered why he had thrown away his life so recklessly. He had fought bravely until his ammunition was exhausted and he was surrounded, so that there was no disgrace attached to his capitulation.

We established communication with the men holding craters on both sides of us, and, when night fell, we connected them by digging a trench six feet deep. Food and implements were brought to us over the rough ground, and before morning we had two Lewis guns in our crater. The ammunition carriers cursed all night, but we were thankful for every cartridge that reached us; they would be needed when Fritz decided to counter-attack. Some of the carriers sank up to their waists in the bad parts and were pulled out by their companions. The food that reached us was cold and gritty, but we were too ravenous to be finical about such matters.

When the first faint streaks of dawn dissipated the opaque blackness in the east, the expected attack was launched, and we saw droves of shadowy figures rising and loping towards us. Most of my men were recruits and only half trained. I told them what we might expect if the Germans reached our crater, and they listened in silence, casting furtive glances at the advancing hordes. My impromptu speech was somewhat as follows: "If you throw down your arms you will be shot for cowardice; I'll see to that. If you get bloody windy when Jerry jumps down on you, or before he reaches you, he'll make cold meat of every mother's son, for those of us who have stopped him before are going to do our best to stop him again, and you

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need expect no mercy if we fail. Aim low, keep cool and save your breath."

When the attackers were near enough to present a good target I gave the order to fire, and we mowed them down in heaps. The Lewis guns did great slaughter until by the worst possible luck both stopped almost at once. It was fortunate that the stoppages were simple, and we got them going again when the foremost attackers were scarcely a dozen yards away. Our rifles were hot and fear gripped my heart, for as fast as we mowed them down others swarmed forward; some of them actually pitched lifeless at our feet. Tomlyn was magnificent and worked like a Trojan. His face was cut, but he seemed to revel in the carnage. His example inspired the others and made all the difference between defeat and victory. Three times the grey lines came at us and we had some tense moments. Under a less resolute commander we would have wavered, but Captain Ewen came along the line and quietly inspired us to super-human exertions. Amid the groaning wounded and huddled dead we forgot everything save that there was to be no retreat. Shells burst so thickly that a thick veil of smoke hung over the disputed ground in all directions. The battle raged all day until, towards evening, our field guns put down such a barrage on Jerry's lines that he must have had very heavy losses. We welcomed a big supply of Very lights and kept the ground in front of us lit up all night, in order to obviate a surprise attack.

Another day came and the wounded who could walk were able to get away. The dead were thrown out in front of the blasted parapet, for we had no time to bury them, and they impeded our movements. The German wounded cried and groaned at intervals; most of them were calling for water. A few stretcher-bearers ventured out, but withdrew when the desultory cross-fire caught a number of them. We did not want them to come too near, as we were afraid they would see how desperate our plight was. As so often happens in war the exigencies of the military situation overruled the humane promptings of the combatants. We suffered from lack of water until after dark a few petrol tins of cold tea appeased our thirst.



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Heavy rain swept the battlefield for half the night, then gradually frost settled over everything and nipped our fingers. The wounded out in the open had no coats, and the rigour of the elements must have killed all those incapable of dragging themselves back to their lines. One young fellow kept shouting for his mother until two of my men volunteered to bring him in. He was almost frozen, and the marvel was that he still lived, for one foot was missing and a bullet had pierced his body. We bound up his wounds and he looked tough, so may have survived.

The German attacks failed not through lack of courage, they had plenty of that, but because they bunched together too much, so that even the poorest marksmen could not miss. We hung on to what we had won for four days, and were relieved in the middle of the fourth night. Owing to some blunder we marched to a spot where there was no shelter of any kind, and waited in a field where formerly turnips had grown; some of the men dug up some stringy roots and ate them. I had picked up some iron rations and shared them with Tomlyn. Our packs had been dumped before the attack and, when I recovered mine, I searched in vain for two pairs of socks; scroungers had been at work.

After marching for the remainder of the day we came to a village that had not been entirely destroyed, and searched among the ruins for shelters that would keep out some of the rain. I found a shed for my section, and although it had not been allotted to us we were not disturbed. The straw was fairly dry and we stuffed the holes in the walls with newspapers. The greatest find was an old tarpaulin that we stretched across the roof and tied securely at the corners. No food was forthcoming, so Tomlyn and I went on the prowl. Some onions were lying in a loft and we bought a loaf, or rather obtained one by bribery, at a dump. That was not enough for ten hungry men so we stole a tin of biscuits from a pile of rations behind an officers' mess. When we reached our shed we were just in time to catch two marauders who were rolling up the tarpaulin ready to carry it away. They were disinclined to give it up so we had to give them a sound drubbing. They belonged to a labour gang, and we were angry that they had the impu-

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dence to steal from fighting men. Our companions heard the altercation, rushed out to see what was amiss, and fell upon them with gusto, so that they were glad to run with the marks of our fists upon them. It was decided to put wire round the hut so that the tarpaulin should not be stolen while we slept.

Next morning when we sat up we looked like miners who had been entombed, unshaven, bleary and caked with mud. Titch was the only lively one, for he had missed most of the battle. We spent most of the day cleaning ourselves, and, in spite of the intense cold, most of us bathed in a pond. I had a small towel, but it was black; the others dried themselves in their lousy undergarments. As soon as the disjointed commissariat got to work again we had plenty of food, as the rations for the killed, wounded, and missing, had to be consumed. Pay came a few days later and we squandered it in riotous living, two miles away in a village that boasted an *estaminet*, and a cottage that sold eggs and chips. A few slatternly women were in great demand.

During the battle one of our men had thrown down his arms and run. He was arrested some miles behind the trenches a week later, and the sentence of the court-martial was that he should suffer death by shooting. I went with an officer and half a dozen men to carry out the sentence. The prisoner was in a yard behind a building that appeared to be the A.P.M.'s headquarters. Troops were drawn up on each side, and the luckless man was placed with his back to the wall, and the sentence read out. He had been given drink, for he staggered slightly, and before the gas helmet was placed over his head he insisted on shaking hands with the firing-party. He was a scraggy youth with a wan, pimply face. The A.P.M. tied the fellow's hands behind his back, and put the helmet on him so that the goggles were at the back, then he was tied to a post. Rifles were in a row against the wall and we were told that one contained a blank. I had no desire to fire, but had to accept the proffered weapon. The master of ceremonies dropped a handkerchief and we fired. I aimed at the wall and so did most of my companions, for only two bullets hit the doomed man; the A.P.M. finished him off with his revolver.

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That night I went with Tomlyn and got blind drunk, for the deserter's face haunted me. In the *estaminet* we met a pal of the dead man and found out something of his history. Apparently he had always been "windy," and ought never to have been in the line. We discussed the ethics of shooting men for cowardice, and it was agreed that unless something were done to discourage desertion during a battle most of us would be tempted to run at critical moments.

As Tomlyn put it that night when I was inclined to pity the poor brute we had shot: "Look here, Saint-Mandé, what the hell's the good of being sentimental about it? War is war and you cannot fight it with kid gloves on. It includes brutality and horrors such as civilians have no conception of, and once an army's *moral* is broken it becomes a howling mob. When those Jerries were rushing at us and the conscripts in our pit were trembling with terror, what kept them there and made them fire like hell? Was it a sense of duty? Was it patriotism? Was it the will to win? You know as well as I do that it was because you assured them that any b—— guilty of cowardice would be shot without fail. Better make an example of a coward now and again than imperil the whole bloody crowd."

Next day a servant came to say that Captain Ewen wanted to see me. The company C.O. was in a farm-house; his room was next to the kitchen which they used as a mess. I found him sitting on an old chair, in front of a big box that he used as a desk. He had been wounded in the face again, a bullet or splinter having made a fairly deep cut on his left cheek, but he refused to go down the line; many officers had got away with less. He smiled when he saw me, rose and shook hands, then congratulated me on my share in the attack. He observed with a laugh that one of the conscripts had been heard to say that although they were frightened of the Germans they were just as frightened of me when I threatened them.

"But I really sent for you to let you know that I have been requested to send in one or two names for decorations; and for your share in the operations, and for bringing down that sniper who was doing such damage, I propose to recommend you for the French Croix de Guerre, as there is one available."

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"I am most grateful, sir, but don't you think I've got enough old iron? If you will allow me I would like to nominate Tomlyn for the award; without him I could not have held that crater with a few windy recruits."

"Well, what can I do for you?"

"If it is in your power, sir, grant me a few days' leave."

"Well, I suppose it could be done if there were a special reason," he replied.

"There is a very special reason, sir," I stammered, "because I want to get married."

Ewen laughed and said: "I'll put down 'urgent domestic reasons,' and if you don't get it this time we'll try again in a week or two. Leave is sometimes curtailed, as you know, when anything is in the wind, so we must wait and see, but you may depend that I'll do all I can."

I went away wondering if the leave would come through; hope and fear struggled for mastery, and I decided to build no castles in the air. As I walked towards the shed I kept repeating: "Blessed is he that expecteth nothing, for he shall not be disappointed." When the letters came there was a fat one from Jean, in which, by a curious coincidence, she discussed the possibility of my obtaining leave in order to get married. As I read her loving words Tomlyn came in and started to sing "Nobody loves me," for he was unlucky and looked in vain among the pile for a letter. Then he began teasing me about my mysterious correspondent whose letters were so heavy. I professed to scoff at the idea of being in love; but he was too good a psychologist, and while making tea, said: "Saint-Mandé, when a man reads a letter with such attention that he fails to hear a friend talking to him, when he goes about as if the bottom has fallen out of his world merely because a certain letter has failed to arrive, when he reads a particular letter every day and several times a day for a week or more, when he ceases to talk about women in the way that all the others do, there's only one explanation, he's in love, and very much in love."

Then he discussed with mock seriousness the danger of falling in love, pointing out that a lover was just as much under a spell as Tristan when he drank the love potion.

"Look here, Saint-Mandé" (it was curious that on no

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occasion during the war or after did I allow any man outside my family to use my first name; it seemed to me effeminate among men), "how can a man be an efficient soldier or anything else when he does nothing but moon round dreaming of a woman? He has become a slave and usually ends by becoming a poor, henpecked worm."

"I don't think you could say there was much fault to find with my efficiency in the last show," I answered with a little pardonable pride.

"Of course not," he laughed, "that's because it hasn't got a firm enough grip yet; it's only at the incubation stage. In a little while you will become an object of pity to all your friends, you will lose weight and refuse to walk abroad at night, lest you tread on a grub or any creeping thing. Then when you go on leave you will stand below her window and sigh. Really I am pained and disappointed; I had expected better things. It passes my comprehension how a man, reputed sane, can alienate his manhood, his freedom, everything he holds dear. I must . . ."

He stopped short when I clapped my hand over his mouth, and I released my hold when he promised to drop the ragging. While we struggled the C.O.'s servant came and told Tomlyn that he was wanted. My pal looked at me somewhat quizzically and scratched his head:

"I wonder what the hell I'm on the carpet for?" he asked ruefully.

"That's the worst of having a guilty conscience," I suggested as he went out. While he was away I made tea, which I heated by burning hard biscuits and candle ends mixed with cotton waste. The cook gave me a pinch of sugar whenever I wanted some, for he was in my section and deemed it prudent to keep in my good books, as he dreaded returning to duty. There was about a pint of cognac in my water-bottle and I made what we called "sergeant-major's" tea with plenty of sugar and condensed milk. When Tomlyn came back he was bursting with excitement, and fearing he was going to weep with emotion I said roughly:

"Come on, no bloody nonsense, drink this."

He shook my hand with a grip that hurt my fingers and

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muttered, rather incoherently, his thanks for my kindness in nominating him for the medal I could have had.

"What rot," I cut in blusteringly. "You deserved it, what the hell are you making such a fuss about?"

"I never expected to get anything as my record is not what you would call exemplary. I've done cells on several occasions and not so long ago got field punishment for telling an officer to go to hell, besides . . ."

"—But good conduct and bravery have nothing in common," I interposed. "Often a man who is impeccable in camp is no damn good in the *mêlée*. Good soldiers are good ruffians, that's why we have both been decorated."

We shared the rum and mixed it with the hot tea; it was gorgeous, and made us forget the trials of the trenches in song and quip. That evening we were preparing to go to the *estaminet* when my leave came through.

A group of fellows crowded round to wish me well, and I left enough money to give the section a merry evening in the *estaminet*. The rail-head was ten miles away and I reached it an hour after leaving the billet, for a lorry gave me a lift. Men came from different regiments, and at midnight the train was full of men who sang, swore, danced, and behaved like lunatics let loose. Some of them, for various reasons, had not been home for two years, and the thought that for a few days they could do as they wished nearly drove them frantic:

"O boy, what time will you get up when you get 'ome?" cried one.

"Don't forget to clean yer rifle, Bert," roared another.

"Look at 'im, 'is old woman loves every 'air on 'is 'ead," chortled a gigantic guardsman, stroking the bald head of a pal.

"I've seen you somewhere, b——d if I 'aven't," bellowed a Cockney, looking hard at a little rat of a man in the Hampshires.

"It ain't unlikely that you 'ave," acquiesced the other. "I worked in Covent Garden for five year, then kept a corfee-stall in the Old Kent Road. A bloke giv me a bad 'arf quid once an' 'e didn't 'arf look like you; what abaht it?"

The others roared until someone struck up "Take me back to dear old Blighty," and we made the welkin ring

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with our roars. A feeble lantern illuminated the truck and threw queer shadows as it swung to and fro. Tiring of the din I went and found the R.T.O., who, in answer to my question, told me the train would not start for another two hours. There was an *estaminet* near the station, and I told the men what I had heard from the Railway Transport Officer. We swarmed up the street and found the drink shop open. The owner no doubt knew when leave trains were going off, and kept open accordingly, although at no time did they show much inclination to put the shutters up. In spite of that there is, to-day, less drunkenness in France than in England where pubs only open for part of the day.

The landlord, his wife, and two daughters, served us as quickly as they could. If they had a leave train once a week they must have made their fortunes. There were at least two hundred men in the bar and pressing round the door. The zinc counter top ran with wine and the floor was flooded. A drunk corporal lined ten men up against the wall and started to drill them. They entered into the spirit of the joke and made every imaginable mistake.

At 2 a.m. the whistle started to blow and we straggled down the village street to the station, which consisted of a rough shelter and a sentry-box. The journey down to Boulogne took ten hours, but was not monotonous, as we were all in high spirits, except a few men who were going home on account of deaths, sickness and other depressing reasons. One worried little man confided that his wife had started living with her lover and neglecting her five young children. I read in the papers a few days later that the aggrieved husband had been sentenced to death for shooting his rival; the sentence was later commuted to penal servitude for life.

In front of me sat two disreputable rascals belonging to a tunnelling company:

"What's yer name?" asked one.

"Pagan."

"Where the hell did yer find that bloody name?"

"Well, one name's as good as another, ain't it?"

"What's yer trade in civil life?"

"A perfumer."

"Well, 'ow the 'ell did you get into a mining company?"

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"Simply said I was a miner."

"An' didn't they ask for proof?"

"No."

"Well, I'm damned, no wonder we're losing the bloody war."

We bought wine and provisions every time the train stopped near a village and some of the men were sick.

"Army rations shrink yer guts, Bill," cried one. "The first time I 'ave a square meal for a year I bring the blasted lot up."

"'Ow much booze did yer 'ave?" retorted his pal.

"Only four bottles of van blank."

The train stopped for half an hour near our destination, owing to the signal being against us, and we crowded into an *estaminet* on the other side of the barrier; it was in the suburbs of Boulogne. The barmaid was a comely wench with red cheeks, an outsize in bosom, and legs like tree trunks. Her skirts were ridiculously short and her undergarments of red flannel were visible. A humorous private in kilts caught her round the waist and tried to make her dance. Another kissed her on the cheek. She shook them off, but on going to another table, was tripped up by an outstretched leg. The fun was waxing fast and furious when the whistle went.

When we saw the blue sea our hearts were gladdened, and we tossed biscuits and coins to ragged women and children who crowded the sides of the lines. The ship was waiting and we filed down the gangway, at the side of which stood two military policemen feeling our packs for shells, fuzes and similar souvenirs. I had a German shell that had burst in our trench, but remained intact save for the fuze which blew off. I had recovered the top and was anxious to get the thing home for a friend. When I saw the police I put the shell on my arm from hand to elbow, and covered it with my coat; in that way I smuggled it over. Great was our disappointment when we found the ship did not sail until after dark, on account, so we were told, of submarines. We whiled away the time gambling on deck, and cheered like one man when, late in the evening, the mooring ropes were cast off, and with black smoke pouring from the funnels the *City of Rouen* steamed out of the harbour.



## CHAPTER XXV

I HAD wired to Jean from Boulogne, and she met me when the train puffed into Victoria station. I saw her apart from the crowd, still in mourning for her father, but strikingly beautiful nevertheless. She was rather pale but looked fit and well; the pallor was probably due to the emotion she must have felt. I was too nervous to lean out of the window and wave, but watched Jean as the long train crawled slowly along the platform. She scanned all the carriages and looked rather distressed.

When the men had tumbled out of my carriage I seized my rifle and pack and, trying hard to master my emotion, strode towards the girl who awaited me. She did not see me until I was a few yards from her, then she gave a little cry and threw her arms round my neck. Nobody heeded us for similar scenes were going on all over the platform. Jean sobbed under the stress of emotion and for five minutes was unable to say a word. Her car was waiting and we walked slowly towards it. Seated inside Jean recovered to some extent, but could not trust herself at the wheel, as she was still trembling. I drove to her flat in a quiet street near Park Lane and garaged the car while Jean went to take off her coat and hat. As soon as I was in the tiny sitting-room she made me feel wretched by dropping on her knees with her arms round my legs, and asking, with her beautiful tear-stained eyes looking up at me, if she was forgiven. I took her to the couch and there she kissed my battered face with fervour, then put her head on my shoulder and wept unrestrainedly. Her thick wavy hair fell round her face and her shapely arms were round my neck.

"Am I forgiven, darling?" she whispered for the *n*th time.

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"There is nothing to forgive, dearest," I replied, stroking her hair.

Gradually she became normal and our lips met in a kiss that must have lasted half an hour. The satisfaction at being together again after so much anxiety found an outlet in tender embraces and clinging kisses. Even at breakfast we kissed in between bites and shared the same cup. I left immediately after the meal and went home for a bathe and change. All the men going on leave had bathed at Boulogne and had received fumigated undergarments, but I still felt dirty and longed for a real hot tub, with plenty of soap and then some soft white linen, so that for a few days I could forget the thick and rough grey-back that irritated a sensitive skin like blazes.

Father was in bed, having been on duty all night as a special constable. Mother was surprisingly calm and much less worried than I had expected. She was full of religious fervour, and her faith had made her more or less impervious to the blows of adversity, for which I was tremendously thankful. A new parson had come to the parish, and from what I could gather was a splendid man who didn't care two hoots for dogma, but went round comforting his flock; his personality was so impressive that he had the most amazing influence over his people, and, I am convinced, did more good by his visits and talks than another would ever do by ranting and fulminating against sinners. Mother seemed now to have a purpose in life and went to the local hospital every day to help and distribute things to the men. She even smiled frequently and bustled about finding my linen. I had bought a new suit and various other articles when I was home a couple of months before, so needed nothing from the outfitter's. Father was a light sleeper and, hearing the noise, came down. He looked tired but fit, and gave me a good grip. My sister Lucile had just reached home from Roedean for the vacation, and jumped about excitedly. I still regarded her as a baby, although she was over fourteen.

The bath was so enchanting that I stayed in it for nearly an hour and came down in civilian clothes. When I had enlisted I was the same height as my father, but three and

a half years of army life had made me shoot up four inches, so that I now towered over him. My shoulders also had broadened and I looked what I was, as hard as nails and as fit as a fiddle. As soon as I was ready I drove round for Jean, and we picked up her aunt, a charming old lady who lived alone at Hampstead. When we reached my home father and mother were standing in the doorway ; Lucile was peeping from behind a curtain.

The marriage was by special licence, and, as soon as the simple ceremony was over, we drove back to my parents' home for lunch. There were no speeches, simply a few suitable toasts. My people liked Jean, and she, in her turn, was fond of them. The aunt was truly a remarkable old dame. Although over seventy she was as active as a woman half her age ; her eyes were clear and bright, her teeth good, and her intellect incredibly sharp. She took me on one side and told me I was a lucky man, for *her* Jean was the finest girl in the world. She meant all she said, for when she died two years later she left us the bulk of her fortune. Jean was quiet but happy, and when I asked her where we were going, she said it was all arranged and I was to ask no questions. We stayed for an hour after lunch and then drove off. Before we started a hatchet-faced virago had time to throw a white feather into the car.

Our first stop was Sevenoaks where we had tea. The day was cold but dry, and the air most exhilarating ; the closed-in car was snug and we had plenty of rugs. When I looked round the back of the car I found we had towed an old shoe all the way from London ; we found out by chance a long time afterwards that Lucile had tied it there. We had tea in a delightful old inn, and were able to sit in front of the fire, as there was no one else in the room. The glow of the fire lit up the table, so we did not switch on the lights. Jean said she was too excited to eat, but I succeeded in persuading her to help me finish the toasted scones.

We spent the first night in Tunbridge Wells ; Jean had booked a comfortable room in an hotel overlooking Happy Valley. There were a number of guests in the lounge, so we asked for dinner to be served in our room, where we had a bright fire. Jean changed while I bathed, and, when I

returned, she was radiant in evening dress of black silk, that emphasized the fairness of her skin and hair.

We spent the honeymoon motoring and walking over the South Downs, and the ten days passed like a dream. On the last day we returned to my parents' home, where Jean was to stay until I returned again. My train was due to leave at noon and Jean wept while I changed into uniform. I did not want her to come to the station, but she insisted on driving me there herself. Mother wanted to come too, but I prevailed upon her to stay at home ; I was afraid she would break down. Father climbed into the car, saying he was coming to look after Jean. He managed to be cheerful, and I was rather glad he came, so that he could comfort Jean on the return journey. He stayed outside the station in the car, and that was the last time I saw him.

The platform was crowded with friends and relatives of the departing troops. A group of Tommies were dancing with their womenfolk, all slightly drunk. Jean watched the hands of the big clock creep round and, just before I stepped into the carriage, kissed me passionately. I was able to lean out of a window and kiss her lips for the last time as the guard waved his flag and the train gathered speed. She stood, a sad but proud figure, waving a tiny handkerchief as we rounded a bend and disappeared from sight.

The journey back was a repetition of the previous ones, and next day I arrived back in the old shed, just as my companions were settling down for the night. Tomlyn had prepared the kip, for we slept together, and we lay smoking until far into the night. He consumed the greater part of a bottle of whisky I brought for him. He had little to report ; the usual fatigues up the line and a few casualties. The new officer in place of the Eton lieutenant was a mere boy and knew practically nothing about his job ; worse still he irritated the men by a sneering tone, which he saw fit to assume when giving orders. There was a rumour that we were going south and that Jerry was preparing a big break-through.

Next day I met Haggard, the new officer in command of the platoon, and he was most affable ; I suspected that

Captain Ewen had given him a talking to. While I was speaking to Haggard the C.O. came along, and after returning my salute shook me warmly by the hand; Haggard was visibly impressed, for Ewen was not given to acts of that kind.

"Well, Saint-Mandé, did you have a good time?" he asked genially. I thanked him and added that the leave seemed a dream from which I was just awaking.

"Yes, my boy, all good things come to an end sooner than we desire; but never mind, it is rumoured that Fritz is going to make a last bid for victory, and if it fails, as it must, he will chuck his hand in. We are going south to-morrow, so shall see a change of scenery at all events."

He turned away with Haggard and I went to drill my men who, to my surprise, had subscribed and bought me a little present. It was a silver cigarette-case which they had ordered from England, and is now one of my most cherished possessions. I was strict on parade, but at other times treated my section as men, and they responded loyally. There was a certain esprit de corps among them and, without any bullying, I got out of them far more than the bullying N.C.O.'s who constantly got the men's backs up. I found them always ready to respond when they knew they were being treated fairly; of course I was lucky in having a decent set of fellows.

I took them to the *estaminet* that evening and they all got drunk at my expense. Two men from another regiment were playing a curious game, and appeared to be making quite a lot of money out of it. They had three cards and, while one man went outside or turned his back, the other invited all and sundry to gather round. Any man, but only one at a time, could touch a card, and bet that the man with his back turned would not guess which one had been touched.

I soon saw through the trick. If the centre card were touched the accomplice at the table picked up his cigarette and took a puff; when it was the left-hand one he put the cigarette pointing to the left, and so on. When no card was touched he kept the fag in his mouth. Tomlyn spotted the dodge after losing twice, and the irate backers threatened

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the tricksters with dire punishment, unless they disbursed their winnings on drink. The confederates were alarmed and treated the company as long as the money lasted, then they were allowed to depart.

They were the same fellows who had made a large sum from both soldiers and civilians by pretending to take photographs with a small camera. I saw them at work when we were out at rest. They stuck a rickety chair in front of a ruined cottage ; an enormous shell that had failed to explode lay near the chair. It was about five feet long and two in diameter ; the weight was terrific, for it took half a dozen men to roll it a yard. Naturally every Tommy wanted his girl to see the size of the iron presents Fritz sent over, and the photographers had a busy time ; they simply coined money. As each sitter posed, one of the artful dodgers looked in the view-finder, cried " Keep still," and pressed the trigger. Some of the sitters grinned, others looked solemn ; some had a cigarette hanging to the lower lip and their cap at a jaunty angle. A few watered their hair and parted it in the middle, cleaned their buttons and made themselves what they called posh. The reprobates posed with their shirt sleeves turned up, showing the heads and inscriptions that the tattoo artist had placed on their arms.

The accomplice who arranged the sitters collected five francs from every one, and even the avaricious peasants thought it worth that sum to have a souvenir of the war. Not a single man suspected that he was being tricked, and great was the joy at the prospect of sending home a real photograph from the front. The pals of the sitter did their best to make him laugh by means of cries, such as :

" Gorblimy, why don't yer wash yer bloody ear-oles, Dirty Dick ? "

" Don't look like that, man, yer ole woman 'll think yer got bats in yer bleedin' belfry."

" Don't scratch, we all know yer lousy, same as us."

When a very ugly private sat for his picture great was the mirth.

" O gawd, look wot's come nah, beautiful Bertie from Bow."

" Don't 'e look like 'is father ? "

"Never mind as long as 'e's 'ealthy."

The two confederates promised to deliver the photographs as soon as the films were developed, which would take a few days. They then disappeared and went to work the trick elsewhere, usually choosing a spot not too near their own camp. However, their luck was out one day, for they tried their blandishments in a village where, unknown to them, some of their dupes were idling after the day's parades. They surrounded the photographer, seized the camera, and found it to be empty, whereupon their righteous ire was vented on the impostors, to such purpose that the frauds had to go sick for a few days.

The last time I saw them they were selling tickets for a raffle. The prize was a gold watch which they claimed to have taken from a German prisoner. The man who was declared the winner confessed, when drunk, that he was paid twenty francs to pretend he had really won the watch, although not only had he never seen it, but he doubted very much its existence. The raffle must have brought the organizers a small fortune as hundreds of soldiers took tickets at five francs each.

Next morning we set off early and moved south. When we marched at ease the men sang and joked as if they were going for a picnic. It was rumoured that millions of Americans were landing and we thought the war was practically over. Heavy would have been our hearts had we known that it was to last nearly another year, and that most of us were destined to go west in trying to stem an onslaught that swept us like chaff before the wind. One of the new men in my section was one of the queerest-looking soldiers I've ever seen. He was below medium height, with absurdly narrow shoulders, and a distinct hump on his back. His legs were almost too thin to support him, and his big boots looked grotesque. His uniform was much too big and the enormous tunic emphasized his lack of chest. He was constantly lifting his cap, for it was always slipping down on his eyes. The men called him Sandow, and his troubles really commenced the day they discovered that he had been a journalist, and had contributed a weekly column in which he gave advice concerning the affairs of the heart.

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Sandow's attempts to look dignified were ludicrous, and each time he pushed his hat up off his ears, somebody knocked it down again. I could not stand the man, for he was an arrant snob and thought he ought to have been an officer. Regularly, about once a week, he asked to speak to Captain Ewen, and that officer tried hard not to smile as Sandow looked up until he nearly broke his neck. He was barely five feet, and the captain was at least six feet five! I once overheard the conversation which went as follows:

*Captain E.* "Well, what do you want?"

*Sandow.* "It's about my commission, sir. I do not wish to hurry you, but I really do think something should be done in the matter. I've been at the front ten days so know what conditions are like."

*Captain E.* "But what makes you think you are fit to be an officer?"

*Sandow.* "Well, sir, I'm an educated man and socially above those with whom I have to associate."

*Captain E.* "What are your academic qualifications again?"

*Sandow.* "The Northern Universities School Leaving Certificate, sir."

*Captain.* "But have you thought over what is expected of an officer? There are certain qualities he must or ought to possess; physical as well as mental."

*Sandow.* "Well, sir, my cousin is an officer and he's no bigger than I, and certainly not as intelligent."

*Captain E.* "I really think that you must wait until I know more about you. You haven't even been in the line yet, so how can I judge your capabilities? I never recommend a man for a commission unless I know he will make a first-class officer. I know there are officers who would never earn their proficiency pay as privates, but that is not my fault."

Sandow turned away, convinced that there was a conspiracy against him, and that unless he got his commission quickly the war would be irrevocably lost. The man who marched next to Sandow was a bull-necked fellow who looked as if he were going to have an apoplectic fit any minute. His bulk was terrifying, and the rifle looked a toy



in his hands. Sometimes he took off his cap so that he could scratch his head, and one saw then that it was completely bald; he had shaved it on account of the lice. Fife, the beefy one, had been a butcher in civilian life, and I have always been convinced, since seeing him, that his trade required little brain, for he had none. He was of a placid disposition but looked extremely fierce. He towered above Sandow in such a way that I was reminded, the first time I saw them together, of Grimm's fairy tale about the tailor and the giant. As we trudged on mile after mile Sandow grew more and more irritable:

"How would you like it if you were a gentleman like me?" he asked Fife. "Would you like to be a private if you were fitted for higher things?"

Fife rather revered the superior education of his companion and grunted:

"It's a bloody shame."

"Sergeant, if you were an educated man like me, wouldn't you put in for a commission?" piped Sandow, turning to me.

I was spared the trouble of replying as the order came down to march at attention; we were nearing a village and some senior officers stood near the first house. When we reached the middle of the collection of houses we halted and found we were to pass the night in adjoining cottages. Tomlyn and I secured a bed, most of the others went into back kitchens or tumble-down outhouses.

After I had seen my men settled in a barn behind the farm, that stood a couple of hundred yards from the other houses, I invited Tomlyn to accompany me while I searched for something a little better. First of all we had a drink in the *estaminet*, where a crowd of A.S.C. lorry drivers were smoking and making eyes at a pretty wench behind the counter. They pretended not to notice us, for they well knew the contempt we had for them.

Leaving the pub we wandered along, until through the open door of a pretty cottage we saw a young woman sewing at a machine. She greeted us with a bright smile and responded with alacrity to our request for a room. Tomlyn was fascinated and stared at her with hungry eyes. She told us she had a spare room and would make us comfortable

as she had made other Tommies who had passed that way. She regretted that owing to financial stress she had but little money, but would go and buy anything we desired if we would give her the money. Both Tomlyn and I were in funds and we gave her a twenty-franc note each, with which she was to get eggs, bread, butter if possible, tinned fruit, sardines and other things too numerous to mention. She scanned our list, looked at the money and said sadly: "*Je regrette, messieurs, mais c'est pas assez; la vie est terriblement chère ici, vous savez. Allez, soyez bons gourges, encore vingt francs.*"

"O hell, what's the good of spoiling the ship for a penny-worth of tar," exclaimed Tomlyn, and gave her a note for a hundred francs. There was method in his madness, as he confessed when she went shopping. He suggested we should share the wench or toss for her. I was sorely tempted, but saw in my mind's eye Jean standing waving and trying to keep back her tears. Now she was really mine I felt it was my duty to remain faithful to her in spite of the cynics who laughed at marital fidelity.

We found a tub in the garden and, after filling it with rain water from a big butt, bathed in a small room behind the house; it looked like a wash-house. The water was freezing, but we felt refreshed and, before the girl returned, we ironed the lice out of our garments. That was a job we were getting quite expert at. The kitchen was getting dark when the shopper returned with her basket heavily laden. She had nothing but a small lamp to light the room, so we decided to buy some candles. Tomlyn spoke French fairly well. It was not correct grammatically, but fluent enough. While I wrote to Jean he sat in front of the fire with the lass and asked:

"What is your name, mademoiselle?"

"Madeleine, m'sieur."

"How old are you?"

"Twenty-one."

"Where are your parents?"

"My father was killed at the front, and my mother by a bomb that a German plane dropped when they raided the village a year ago."

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"How do you manage to live, poor child?"

"One does what one can. The soldiers are very kind."

Lowering his voice and putting his arm round her, my pal began to whisper to her.

I had the lamp at my side and it began to fail so I called to Tomlyn:

"At the risk of interrupting your amorous activities, I suggest we go in search of booze and candles, otherwise we may get there when it's too late."

"Look here, Saint-Mandé, be a sport and do the buying. If I go some b—— is sure to slip in and collar my wench; possession is nine-tenths of the law, you know."

I agreed to do the shopping and went down the street. A few soldiers were rowdy and half drunk, but the majority had no money and remained sober. One of my section, Meadows, spotted me, and came with his tongue hanging out. He was a tall, thin fellow who had roughed it in a good many lands. He boasted that he had seen the inside of prisons in every part of the Empire, and they were all better than that of Lourenço Marques, the capital of Portuguese East Africa, where he had done twelve months' hard for theft, although he protested his innocence.

"What about a drink, sergeant?" (He usually called me something that sounded like "sarge.")

"Where's all your money?"

"Christ, yer surely don't expect ten francs to last a month, 'ave a 'eart."

His face was thin and red, with eyes of the deepest blue. He would sell his soul for drink and that had been his downfall. When the South African War broke out he was an undergraduate in one of the Cambridge colleges and threw down his books to join the C.I.V. He was wounded and contracted enteric, but liked the country so much that he took his discharge there, and served for three years in the mounted police. Tiring of that, he obtained a post in the Johannesburg mines.

He looked at me with a smile and added: "What's a drink to a man like you? If I were rolling in money I'd treat you every night. *Noblesse oblige*, you know."

"Where are the other men in my section?"

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"Scattered all over the village. Some are looking for skirt, others for grub and not a few are in the pub."

"Here you are then, you old rascal," I replied, handing him a ten-franc note.

"Do you want change?" he asked eagerly.

"I haven't said so."

"Swelp me God, you're a bloody gent. Come and have one with me, don't be stand-offish, as one gentleman to another."

I accepted his invitation and we had a glass of cognac each, although at first the woman said she was not to let the troops have anything stronger than wine. Meadows could drink wine like water, it had no effect on him; only spirits satisfied his craving. Raising his glass, he looked at the lights in it and said:

"Well, sarge, this may be *Fons et origo malorum*, but life would not be worth living without it. Good health, long life and, failing that, sudden death, for what the hell's the good of suffering or surviving as a cripple?"

I left him after a few minutes in the assurance that he would soon be blind drunk. Once he had the entrance fee to a pub he was in clover. His silver tongue and wit would get him a drink anywhere. He was, although only about forty-five, much older than most of the other men in the company, and his tales of adventures in all parts of the world, whether true or false, always kept his glass full.

I returned with a dozen candles and half a dozen bottles of tolerably good wine. The grocer tried to profiteer, but only growled when I cursed him roundly in French, threatened to turn the hungry men loose on his shop, and threw down what I considered a fair price. Tomlyn and Madeleine came in when I knocked on the table.

We had a glorious supper and ate until we were fit to burst. In civilian life one rarely feels really hungry. I mean hungry enough to chew raw onions or turnips with relish. In the army young men are almost always hungry and it keeps them fit. During the war I was heavier than I have ever been since, although sometimes my belly was so empty that I couldn't sleep. While I was in the ranks a really good appetizing meal was as rare as rain in the

Sahara. It was so rare that one talked and dreamed about it for many days after the event. To feel one's belly full was as satisfactory in the trenches as to know one has wiped off an overdraft in peace time.

After supper I played the piano and Tomlyn sang. He had a fine tenor voice, and we went over all the old sentimental ditties so dear to the heart of the fighting man. Madeleine helped us to consume the liquor, and, judging by the way she stood it, I came to the conclusion that she was an old hand at the game. After all, troops had passed through that village for three and a half years and many had been billeted there for months, so it would be unreasonable to expect all the girls to be virgins. She understood English perfectly and spoke it quite fluently. Tomlyn was flabbergasted when he heard her, as he had discussed her physique and mode of making love, assuming she was ignorant of our tongue.

Next day we covered thirty miles and in the evening camped outside a small town. Civilians came selling things like fancy post cards, eatables and, surreptitiously, alcohol. The camp appeared to be permanent for troops on the march, and the local inhabitants had no doubt acquired trading rights, but the way they concealed the booze under aprons and in baskets seemed to indicate that its sale in the camp was forbidden. Again Tomlyn and I were able to get away, and made a bee-line for a *patisserie*, where we gorged ourselves with cream cakes and pastry.

After a few drinks we explored the town; it was dirty, evil-smelling, and in darkness. Soldiers were in every street, and prostitutes peeped out of doorways trying to entice men in. Half-starved dogs and cats slinked in dark corners and rubbish lay in the gutters. We wandered up side-streets and met ragged urchins who offered to take us to their sisters for a few francs. As we walked, the moon rose and, before long, we heard the familiar drone of aircraft. A hooter gave the alarm and every light in the town went out.

At the corner of the street we came upon an *estaminet* of which the door stood open with a shutter across the aperture. On the other side of the road we had noticed a

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shelter under a house, and big white letters on the wall announced that the *abri* was capable of holding a hundred people. We judged the chances of being hit and came to the conclusion that they were negligible.

While we stood near the café door the bombs started to fall and the noises of the explosions reverberated throughout the darkened streets. "This is no bloody bon," said Tomlyn with emphasis; "let's get inside." We crawled under a corner of the shutter and at the same moment there was an ungodly crash in the street outside. We were thrown flat and bottles fell all round us. Our nerves were rather shaken, for the bombs were all dropping in our area, and we expected at any minute to be blown to smithereens. I was always more windy when bombs were falling than when bullets or shells were being fired at us. In a good trench the risks of a direct hit from projectiles with a fairly flat trajectory were not nearly as great as those of being hit by pieces of a bomb from the air or debris from stricken houses. It may have been, too, that we were more accustomed to bullets and shells; we rarely had air bombs in the line and therefore feared them more. Fritz often bombed the back areas, but one was fairly safe out in the open country.

The moon shone bright and, peeping out of the shop, I saw about twenty planes hovering over the town. Tomlyn struck a match and we examined the room. In a pool of blood lay the landlord with his apron stained red. The back of the premises had been blown in and the roof sagged ominously. Two children had been killed in bed and the bedroom was completely wrecked. We went back to the bar and searched for bottles that were still intact. Every one that we could see had been broken so we pulled up the trap-door and went down into the cellar. In spite of the thuds and explosions, our choice was deliberate, and we selected the best until we filled a sack. Hardly had we got it to the floor above when the most appalling crash was heard and heartrending cries came from the house opposite. It was impossible to ignore them so, hiding our booty, we rushed across. An enormous bomb had dropped on the house over the shelter and crashed through to the

cellar. Shrieks and groans filled the air; fumes, smoke, and dust, made breathing difficult.

Tomlyn and I were able to clear a way down to the cellar by pulling away a lot of the debris that obstructed the entrance. We had no light beyond matches, but they were sufficient to reveal the state of the cellar. The remains of men, women, and children, were lying in their blood; many dead little hands still clutched toys. A few infants still lived and we did not know whether to take them outside or leave them where they were. The men were all aged and most of them wore beards. I picked up a pretty golden-haired girl of five or six; one hand and both feet had been severed; she had lost a lot of blood and died in my arms. Tomlyn had found a lantern and we tried to bind up some of the wounded with strips of linen taken from the dead. A badly-wounded mother shrieked like a lunatic for her two dead children; she must have gone mad, for she beat her breasts and tore her hair. While we were bandaging the wounded a group of Medical Corps men came clattering down the stairs, and set to work with the proper equipment. Out of over sixty people in that shelter I do not think ten survived.

My pal and I could do nothing further so we went to look for our swag. The anti-aircraft guns were blazing away like mad, but theirs was a thankless task; they did their best, but it was almost as hard as trying to hit the man in the moon. I saw the "Archies" as they were called send up millions of shells during the course of the war without ever hitting a machine. However they forced them to keep fairly high, and sometimes put the wind up them, so their labour was not quite in vain. The German planes had moved from our district and were no doubt making for home. Machine-guns began to crackle in the air and we saw coloured lights moving overhead. While we watched a flame appeared and grew larger, then like a flaming meteor a huge bombing-plane swept to earth. Next day we heard that two of the raiders had been shot down by the Royal Air Force.

We breathed a sigh of relief when we discovered the liquor intact, and lost no time in getting away from the café in

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case any Red-caps happened to come patrolling. The sackful of booty was very heavy and we took turns at carrying it. Our camp was a mile or so from the town, and we got back just as our companions were returning from examining a gigantic hole, that a bomb had made, in a field less than a hundred paces from the nearest tents. I wondered whether the Fritz airman had aimed at the camp, or whether he had discharged his last pill to facilitate his flight. The hole was colossal, and when it was measured next day by some individual with mathematical leanings, it was found to be thirty feet across the top and fourteen deep in the middle.

"'Ow would yer like that on yer nut, Charlie?" asked a man at my side.

"If this keeps on someone is bound to get hurt," replied his pal, repeating an ancient joke that always raised a laugh.

"I'm goin' ter kip under me umbrella to-night," cried Titch, referring to an old gamp he had picked up in some ruins near the trench we last occupied. He created much mirth by putting it up and singing dismal ditties while the rain poured through the holes.

There was a bottle of good wine for every man in the section and we sat round a fire drinking, singing, and telling yarns. Meadows was dead drunk, as he had drunk four bottles in all. Three of the recruits were teetotallers, but he coaxed them to come for their bottles and hand them over to him.

We marched the whole of Christmas Day, and although our mouth-organ expert had been killed, a number of his pupils had attained sufficient proficiency to play tunes that, if not very musical, were at least recognizable.

Our journey had been rather circuitous, and when it ended we found ourselves between Villers-Faucon and Ronsoy, some twenty miles east of Peronne. It was probably nearer fifteen miles in a straight line and twenty by the road we took. The country was dreary, but had not been damaged as much as the Ypres district, although Peronne and all the villages were in ruins. We were in tents and the weather was bitterly cold. Fires were forbidden, and



after the day's drills we lay huddled together under the canvas, talking and smoking.

The day after our arrival I discovered that we were now part of the Fifth Army, and that Fritz was making plans for a big attack. There was no occupied village for many miles, and we had to depend on a canteen that supplied little beyond weak tea and biscuits.

One night I could not sleep; the cold was intense, the lice active and my old wounds ached. When I heard the cooks stirring I got up to scrounge a tin of tea, and walked towards the cook-house which was barely a hundred yards from my tent. I had just reached the fire and was trying to restore my circulation when the air shook with the most hellish succession of explosions, and smoke hung over the camp. Some of the tents were flat and there was confusion everywhere. A plane with black crosses was racing home as fast as it could go, pursued by bursting shells; rifles and machine-guns barked, and shot bits from the fabric, but the daring airman got away. He had evidently come over at a great height while it was still dark; then, at the first gleam of dawn, he stopped his engine and came very low over the camp so that he couldn't miss.

I rushed over to the tents and tried to help the wounded. There were at least a dozen huge holes in the ground and one tent with its ten occupants had entirely disappeared. Mutilated remains were laid out on the grass while stretcher-bearers took the wounded to a dressing-station in the village. There were over twenty dead and a number of the wounded could not possibly survive. A youngster who joined with the last batch had both legs shattered, and died while I was giving him a drink. Corporal Harrison was missing, but I was able to establish his identity by disregarding squeamishness and examining a bundle of rags and bloody chunks of a human body. The torn papers and photographs were those of Harrison; we were able to collect the bits in a sand-bag or two, and bury them under his name. The dead were buried after breakfast and for two or three days we were glum; but, marvellous to relate, at the end of the week we played football with all the zest imaginable. I missed Harrison very much, for, although rough and uncouth.

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he was straight, never tried to shirk, and in a quiet way did any amount of useful work. He had been out almost from the beginning and had endured, in his four winters at the front, more than anyone will ever know. Even when his wounds troubled him he never complained and was a real stoic. Sometimes at night when I sat smoking and he could not sleep I would say:

"What's the matter, old chap?"

He answered quietly without a trace of bitterness:

"It's them wounds. I've been 'it in both arms and legs, an' when one stops aching the other starts."

The curious thing was that Harrison had never been decorated for bravery, although he had done far more than the majority of those who had. I always felt an impostor in his presence, for if ever a man deserved a string of medals it was he.

My only solace in those dreary days was that the mail came regularly, and almost every day Jean's thick letter reached me. She was remarkably cheerful and full of plans for the future. With mother she visited hospitals, and did much useful work of the kind that does not bring one into the limelight, such as visiting the very poor and helping them. I read every letter until I had the contents off by heart, then burnt them, for I did not want them to fall into other hands if I were killed.

I corresponded fairly regularly with two or three of my friends who had been wounded. Their letters usually told of shirkers who squirmed like rats in a hole to avoid being sent to the front. One of the artful dodgers, a gorbellied corporal, was sent up with a bunch of men to replace those who had been wiped out by the bombs. He had been notorious for bullying, and, when the men saw him, they whooped with delight and swore to give him hell in the line.

We drilled hard every morning and usually played football in the afternoon. Captain Ewen was like a father to his men and saw to it that they were as comfortable as possible. We had two spells of eight days in the line and then for nearly a month were on working parties every night. Elaborate fortifications were being constructed, and we saw clearly that Fritz meant business. We put out

countless coils of wire, and extra machine-guns were allotted to each company. We were all eager for the coming fray, for it was felt that we could hold the line in spite of any onslaught, and our experiences on the Somme and elsewhere had taught us that, if defending troops were resolute enough, and sufficiently equipped with machine-guns, the best attacks were bound to fail after slight initial gains, at appalling cost to the attackers.

The period from January, 1918, until the big attack was launched on March 21, stands out in my mind as a time of deadly monotony with moments of intense activity. Except for a few raids our sector was quiet. We suffered most from cold and hunger; the rations got steadily worse and the news from home about food conditions was most depressing. We heard of large grain boats going down at the rate of twelve or so per week, and although my people did not complain, some of the men were bitter about the way their wives had to stand in queues for a scrap of meat or butter.

One night I had a lucky escape. We were in the line in front of Epéhy and I was walking round to see that the sentries were on the alert. It was a cold night and before returning to the dug-out, I stood admiring the beauty of the landscape in the moonlight. Snow had fallen during the day and the world round me was clothed in white. The leaves that hung over the parados scintillated with a thousand gems; there was a strange, uncanny, unreal beauty over everything. The sky was crowded with stars and planets, and I gazed upwards in sheer ecstasy, until the sudden zip of machine-gun bullets sweeping the foliage behind me warned me to keep low.

I was on the point of retracing my steps when I heard the distant sound of a gun firing, then the noise of the approaching shell which, with an alarming crescendo, that made me crouch low, landed in the trench a little higher up. The detonation was terrific and knocked me flat, although I was at least twenty feet from the scene of the explosion. When I reached the spot I stood aghast, for the dug-out I had left ten minutes before was a sight to curdle the blood. The shell, which must have been a big

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one, had gone clean through it and blown it to atoms. Sand-bags, wooden props, and shattered remains, were scattered round a gaping cavity. Willing hands pulled at obstructions and worked feverishly to reach anyone who might still live. With a heavy heart I saw the mangled remains of Tomlyn, Titch, Meadows and most of my section. Not one remained alive. We threw the remains back in the hole and buried them where they lay. Next day it snowed, and the stones over the grave were covered with a white mantle. We pulled out next night and for some days I thought I was losing my reason.

Tomlyn and I had an arrangement by which the survivor should have all parcels until the dead man's relatives stopped them. The day after he was killed a big parcel came for him, from his mother and sisters, with a loving message. The delicacies were tempting, but I could not touch them. When I tried to eat a biscuit it stuck in my throat, and I handed the parcel over to the survivors of the section, who numbered three or four; they had been in another dug-out.

We spent a lot of time with Lewis guns, and almost all the men became expert marksmen with them. At night we had the eternal working parties, carrying planks for the engineers, and the usual trench stores for those in the line. One night I was in charge of twenty mules heavily laden. My men knew nothing about the management of those fierce animals, and when we got near the trenches the wicked brutes started to kick and plunge in all directions as if they scented danger. One lad was kicked in the chest and died before we found him.

We did not realize anything was amiss until we saw one animal careering among the others without its attendant. Our path lay across a meadow in which lay coils of barbed wire, and one mule got tangled up in the obstruction. In trying to free itself it lashed out viciously and caught a man on the ankle, breaking it like a twig. I have always been convinced that the injured man put his leg in the way of the animal's hoofs deliberately, for he had been utterly unnerved since the shell landed on the dug-out. He had been on sentry-go in the next bay and the shell landing so close to him had deranged his nerves. The mule was badly

torn by the wire and, by lashing out spasmodically, kept us clear. After trying to help the brute and tearing my hands on the wire I was going to leave it, when one of my men pointed out that a leg was broken; so I shot the maddened creature, and found a certain satisfaction in doing so.

One night we were returning from the trenches when Fritz started to shell the road and we lay down in a ditch for cover. In the distance, hoofs beat the road, and we heard some artillery wagons galloping towards us. When they were almost abreast of us a shell burst in the middle of the leading team and smashed it up. The others could not pass and the road was full of plunging horses and cursing men. Fritz was hitting the target with fair regularity, and, while the drivers were trying to liberate the frantic horses, and pull them out of the way, other shells crashed on to the wagons and limbers in the rear.

The sergeant in charge had been killed by the first shell that hit the leading team, and chaos reigned supreme. It seemed useless to sacrifice any of my men needlessly, so I waited until the shelling grew less intense. When we ventured out, the road looked as if it had been mined, and every wagon was in pieces; shells littered the stretches that remained intact, and we heard a few feeble cries for help. Out of four teams of six horses not a single animal remained unwounded. They had kicked at each other in their attempts to get free, and the dead drivers were lying among the disembowelled animals. We found the remains of ten men, and two were still alive. While we were searching for the bodies other wagons and lorries came along, and cursed at finding the road blocked, so we dragged the dead horses to the side of the road and laid the mutilated bodies of the drivers on the grass. A road-gang came with picks and shovels and set to work.

We had done our share and made for home. We were now in huts of tin that were as cold as the tents. It was nearly dawn when we got back, and saw, when the lamp was lit, that we looked like butchers with blood-covered boots and hands. Most of us had clots of it on our clothes. One peculiar incident in connexion with that affair stands

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out in my memory. A man named Hammond, who had just come up with a batch of recruits, had a powerful torch, and, when we started looking for the wounded drivers, I asked him to shine it on the wreckage or lend it to me. He refused, saying it was not an army torch and he didn't want to waste it! I was so annoyed that I floored him with a heavy blow to the jaw and, while he was recovering his wits, used his torch. Next day he complained to Captain Ewen, who said quietly: "Thank your lucky stars you did not have me to deal with under such circumstances; if you had you would not be in a fit state to complain to-day." The man admitted he was in the army against his will, and turned out a thorough nuisance before he was killed. He was one of the few men whose deaths I did not regret.

We spent the first half of March digging and wiring reserve trenches near Epéhy. The weather was on the whole cold and dry; old telegraph poles provided plenty of fire-wood, and in spite of the strenuous toil we had a good time. After the day's work we sat in a shelter we had constructed by digging a large hole in the side of a small quarry. Our abode was practically shell-proof, and we slept soundly. Games were played in the quarry, which was about thirty feet square at the bottom; the most popular amusement was boxing, and we had some exciting bouts.

Many evenings were devoted to rat-hunting, and we blasted them out of their holes with T.N.T. When they rushed out we chased them with sticks, and the quarry resounded with our cries. One evening we had made an enormous blaze with trees we had cut down, thinking Fritz would not see it. But the flames must have been reflected in the sky, and, in the middle of a sing-song, such a hail of shells came over that we had to scuttle like rabbits to our hole. The shelling started at nine and with Teutonic thoroughness continued until midnight.

If our shelter had not been built well into the side of the quarry facing Fritz we should have perished to a man. When we first selected the spot most of the men wished to camp out on the floor of the quarry, as they disliked the labour of cutting into the stony face. At first I was inclined to let them have their way but fortunately my better

judgment triumphed, and I insisted on the excavating. It took many weary hours but saved our lives. We lay scared to death, watching the five-nines hurtling, smashing, screaming, and roaring into the quarry, while pieces of steel and stone whizzed to and fro like angry bees. The shells did not penetrate far as they burst on the solid rock floor. When shells go deeply into the ground the damage above is, as a rule, far less than when a special fuze or a particularly hard surface makes the shell burst on impact. We had only one casualty. One foolish man, in order to impress the recruits no doubt, went out to explore during a lull; before he could get back he was blown to little bits. We found his head on a tree next day about twenty yards from the explosion.

Next morning all was quiet, and we wandered about picking up fuzes and thick pieces of steel. The bottom of the quarry looked as if extensive blasting operations had been in progress; so there had, of course, but not of the kind quarrymen usually indulge in. It took three days' hard work by six men before we could resume our games.

When our section of trench was completed we went back, and next day the battalion was paraded to listen to a speech by the colonel. He was of medium height with iron-grey hair, slight of build and with a dark brown face, keen and intelligent looking. He had a row of ribbons that proclaimed the old soldier, and it was rumoured that he had risen from the ranks. There was something noble and imposing about him; he impressed us far more than the big, bull-necked, fire-eating colonels, who roared and cursed every time they spoke to their men. We paraded in front of our huts in the late afternoon. Each company formed one side of the square and the sergeant-major called us to attention as the C. O. appeared. His voice was firm and clear, and the diction admirable. There was no attempt at oratorical frills that would have been lost on most of us; it was a plain talk from a gallant leader who was destined to fall rallying his men a few days later.

To the best of my recollection he spoke as follows: "Men, you have no doubt heard rumours that the enemy intend making a desperate bid for victory, and the most deadly

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of his thrusts will, as far as I can tell, be delivered in the sector we are to occupy ; we must bear the brunt. If we can blunt the spear-head we shall delay the advance so much that reinforcements will have time to come to our aid. There must be no giving way. England expects that every man will do his duty ; that is as true to-day as it was in the time of Nelson, and I know you will bear those words in mind. There must be no retiring without orders. If our line is broken and we are split up into isolated groups we must fight to the last. The numbers opposed to us are bound to be greater than our own, that is true in every attack. All the more reason why we must fight hard and aim straight. Above all keep cool, excited men lose their heads in more senses than one. A small army, with good discipline and morale, can always beat a horde of undisciplined men ; that has been shown over and over again. Obey your leaders implicitly, and if they are wiped out, carry on in accordance with the best traditions of the Service. I have confidence in you and I know you will not fail me."

As he spoke the sun, a huge red ball, sank slowly behind him. For a while it seemed to rest on the horizon, just as one sees it in Christmas cards. The air was strangely still ; even the eternal rumble in the east seemed quieter than usual ; a flock of sparrows twittered on a wire overhead, and a stray shell dropped in a field on our left. The men looked tense, and when the colonel finished, broke into a spontaneous cheer. When we were dismissed I walked towards the hut wondering how the conscripts would behave in a really tight corner, and silently cursing my luck at being in a spot that would probably call for supreme sacrifices. My spirit was not broken, but life was sweet, and I had no desire to throw it away. A man in front of me yelled :

"Hoch der Kaiser,  
Donner und Blitzen,  
Salmon and Gluckstein,  
A-a-a-a-a-ch !"

The men in the hut were full of excitement and had figured it out that we would easily repulse Fritz and he



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would at once sue for peace. I sat down and wrote two letters, one to Jean, the other to my parents.

Later in the evening the mail came in and I received several letters and three parcels. Jean sent me a wristlet watch that lasted exactly one hour, for, immediately after putting it on, I set about chopping trees, my favourite hobby, and must have broken part of the mechanism, for the watch stopped and, as far as I know, never went again. There was a letter from mother in which she said she was praying for me many times in the night and in the day. It made me feel wretched, for it betrayed her anxiety. Some old maiden aunt sent the usual cap comforters, body-belts and socks. She meant well, but her gifts were wasted, for body-belts became lousy so quickly that I had long ceased to wear them; woollen comforters were forbidden as they covered the ears, and her socks were always much too big or too small. She sent an enormous woollen muffler about once a week, and I gave them all to men in the platoon, as I had a horror of wrapping up my throat. In all my service at the front I rarely had a bad cold in spite of being often soaked to the skin; my immunity was due partly to not wrapping up too much. An unknown friend sent me a large gift of cigarettes with the request that I should distribute them to my men. That lady repeated the act several times and I sent a card of acknowledgment and thanks. She later visited me in hospital and was a fine woman. She was middle aged and of considerable means; her fiancé had been killed in the Boer War and she had devoted all her time and money to helping others; she and Jean became fast friends.

It was Saturday next day, and as I was free in the afternoon I walked several miles to the west, trying to find a village where I could buy something better than weak tea and insipid biscuits. In England Saturday afternoon and Sunday were different from other days, but at the front all days were the same. As far as I could see, every village had been destroyed by the Germans in their great retreat which took place in the winter of 1916 and the spring of 1917. Some historians have waxed wrathful because the Germans laid waste the country they evacuated. Such

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critics appear to forget that all is permissible in war, and that it is the height of folly to leave buildings that might be utilized as shelters by the advancing troops. One British historian, whose book has become extremely popular because he depicts the Allies as angels and the Germans as devils, is either a first-class fool or a consummate hypocrite. The enemy are called barbarians because they cut down trees, although in my opinion they were perfectly justified in doing so, for wood is capable of many uses at any time, and its importance is vastly increased in time of war.

A lorry gave me a lift into Péronne and I wandered through the ruins watching French civilians accompanied by gendarmes, groping among the debris of their homes. A little child came and gave me a flower plucked from a soldier's grave. She was a girl of about three and in one hand she held the fuze of an 18-pounder shell:

"Come away, O human child!  
To the waters and the wild  
With a faery, hand in hand,  
For the world's more full of weeping  
Than you can understand."

On turning down a side street I saw a man peeping out of a hole in the ground. He greeted me in French and, when I answered him, he invited me to a cup of coffee. With some difficulty I clambered down into the cellar and found it fairly comfortable. There was a stove, three beds, some chairs, a table and odd pieces of furniture. My host explained that he, with his wife and daughter, had refused to leave, and had remained in their cellar under the ruined house ever since the shells started to rain on the town. He said that the Germans had allowed them to remain, and had even given them scraps of food. The fellow was something of a humorist, for he had hung a notice outside which ran as follows:

"No hawkers,  
No circulars,  
No beggars,  
No priests."

While we were talking the man's wife and daughter

returned ; they were apparently paid to supervise certain properties and, in one way and another, managed to live. The parents were about fifty years of age and the daughter twenty. The man explained that he had only one foot, having lost the other in a railway accident, which explained why he had not been taken for military service. On my way back I came to a German cemetery and noticed the graves of several British airmen. Less than a mile away was a British burying-ground, and I wandered through it, reading the names. There were quite a number of men from my regiment buried there ; some of them I had known. One I remembered because he always sang at impromptu concerts and preferred, as a rule, lugubrious airs that he sang with mock seriousness. His most popular song started as follows :

" Oh the worms crawl in and then crawl out,  
They do eyes right, then turn about :  
Bring their friends and their friends' friends too  
Then all of them nibble the hell out of you."

I passed a gang of negroes repairing the road ; they looked happy and were singing. Our so-called civilization has made us morose, we are so intent on securing enough money to make us happy that we become warped in the struggle, and lose whatever capacity for happiness we may have had. The blacks have remained young in spirit, and without our ambitions are also exempt from our cares. Even among white people the poorest are usually the happiest ; that is why labourers sing and landlords don't. It is the story of La Fontaine's " Le Savetier et le Financier " over again. The niggers sang their old plantation songs with such feeling that I waited and watched them for a long time.

After the war I was telling a friend how well the blacks sang and he snorted : " How could you waste your time listening to bloody niggers ? " That is an attitude happily rare in Europe, but common in America and South Africa. It is curious how the most drunken, degraded, and stupid white believes himself superior to the most cultured and enlightened black.

By means of a simple trick I was able to tell Jean and my

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people anything I wished without the censor being any the wiser. Here is a passage from a letter I sent home just before the German attack:

*I am very glad to hear that you are all well and that mother remains cheerful. The parcel arrived safely and the contents were thoroughly enjoyed. Do not send any sugar as I have learnt to do without it. We have plenty of sport when not in the line and football is a very popular pastime. In spite of the intense cold I am quite fit and even go for long runs when duty permits. Please send me a few books, including if possible:*

*"Aucassin et Nicolette."*

*"The Decameron."*

*"The Memoirs of Benvenuto Cellini."*

*"The plays of Aristophanes."*

*"Representative Men," Emerson.*

*"Principles of Human Knowledge," Berkeley.*

*I heard a good story the other day about one of the men who got so helplessly drunk in the trenches that he could not stand up. His pals put him on a stretcher, for the general was coming round inspecting. Seeing the supposed corpse, the big pot saluted and said dramatically: "The army salutes her glorious dead"; the old boy was scarcely out of earshot when the toper sat up and muttered: "What th'll is the old sod talkin' abaht?" Another joke is about a sentry who had the strictest orders to let no one pass. After some time an important-looking officer came along and tried to bully the recruit into letting him pass. In desperation the great one hissed:*

*"You bloody fool, don't you know I'm the G.O.C.?"*

*"No," answered the private, "I don't care a damn who you are, and you wouldn't get past me if you was G.O.D."*

That letter reached home safely and my people were able to read that my battalion was going into the line near Epéhy, that the Germans were going to make a big attack and that therefore I might not be able to write for some time. Certain letters had been made thicker than others and the code was simply stringing the thickened letters together.

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We continued working hard on a most elaborate defence system ; we had a red line, a blue line, and so on. Cables were buried and dumps of shells were made near all the guns. Our planes had reported enormous concentrations of men and guns behind the German lines ; it appeared that prisoners had blabbed and there was no doubt about the severity of the blow that was going to be dealt us.

We went into the front line on March 15 and for a few days Fritz was rather quiet. We were out every night, strengthening the wire and patrolling No Man's Land. Some of my men were nervous and two disappeared one night. No trace could be found and I was fairly sure they had gone over to the enemy. One night I was out with a patrol of four men and we came in contact with some Germans. The encounter was bloody. I lost two men killed and we wiped out five Jerries. They had no papers or letters, so we obtained no information.



## CHAPTER XXVI

ON the night of March 20 I was in charge of the sentries and had no idea that the impending attack was imminent. Suddenly, at about four in the morning, we were subjected to a bombardment that was the most severe I had ever been in. Shells of all calibres rained on us like hail, and, in response to our frantic distress signals, the artillery made such a feeble reply that it was obvious they were suffering heavily themselves. Later, in hospital, some gunners told me they had most of their guns destroyed by shooting that was phenomenally accurate.

Our trench was soon like a shambles and it seemed to me that if the strafe kept on much longer at such an intensity there would not be a single man left to oppose the German advance. Gas-shells came over like hail and obliged us to keep our masks on. The officers had their revolvers drawn, with orders to shoot any man who might try to run away. Some of the wounded had torn off their gas-masks and were paying the penalty. The masks became uncomfortable after a few hours, the eye-pieces became blurred and one felt a choking sensation. Sefton lay near me with an arm off and his chest soaked in blood. He had torn his mask away and gasped for air with blackened lips. Every breath he took choked him.

When dawn came we saw the gas hanging in a thick mist and that gave us a respite, for we knew Fritz would not advance until the air cleared. I was stumbling along the wrecked trench encouraging the sentries when a bullet grazed my temple just above the right eye and made a deep gash. My mask was ripped open, and I was in a state of abject fear while I rushed to a dead man and pulled off his helmet. The blood pounded in my temples as I held my breath, and, although the whole incident did not occupy

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more than two minutes, I was on the point of collapse when the new helmet was adjusted.

That bombardment lasted five hours, hours of agony such as I hope I shall never have to endure again in this or any other world. That any of us should have escaped was indeed a miracle, for the massed guns behind the German trenches belched death with demoniacal fury. I saw most of my comrades blown to pieces while I crouched, feeling as a prisoner in America must feel when he is in the fatal chair waiting for the current to be turned on. My heart thumped, I closed my eyes and tried to pray, but my brain reeled and I could not think coherently. I found myself repeating with the fervour of despair: "O God have mercy on me, O Christ have mercy on me, a miserable sinner; spare me and I vow to turn from sin and lead a new life devoted to thy service." I felt like a worm when the ground is being turned up by the spade. Great lumps of earth spouted up in every direction, steel roared and whistled past my ears. Like a frenzied maniac I looked at the bundles of bloody rags round me, and wondered what I should look like when the shell with my number on reached me, for it was impossible to come alive out of that ghastly inferno. Would my head be severed or my entrails litter the trench? Or would a monster shell bury me deep in the earth? The heavens flamed, the earth danced, smoke and gas filled the valley. The gods had gone mad and were intent on obliterating us. I had been in many bombardments, but on that fateful March morning the cataclysm that swamped us was, I am convinced, more devastating than anything of its kind in the whole history of artillery operations.

Our own guns had almost ceased firing when the deluge of steel that had played on us for so many hours lifted and swept the area behind us. The crackling of bullets announced that Fritz was coming over, favoured by a thick ground mist that nullified all our elaborate defensive plans. I collected ten men, the remains of my platoon with some strays. We all were in a badly shaken state and as pale as death. The gas was dispersed by a gentle breeze and we were able to pull off our gas-helmets.

Captain Ewen came along and looked as if he had just

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crawled out of his grave. His head was bound up and blood was dripping from his left hand. He cried to us in a hoarse voice: "Don't forget, men, no retreat and no surrender as long as there's a cartridge left. Saint-Mandé, you shoot dead any man who attempts to run or give himself up."

He crawled away to rally the others and we awaited the enemy with tense faces and parched lips. We suffered much from thirst that day and I chewed leaves to moisten my mouth. By great good luck I had been able to recover a half-buried Lewis gun and some drums of ammunition. The gun was choked with earth—the slightest bit of grit or dirt puts them out of action—but we got it going before the infantry attack started. Two men were set to work filling pans, and I decided to work the gun myself, as most of the fellows with me were in a bad state of funk, and capable of abandoning it when Fritz got near.

The crackle of bullets continued for about fifteen minutes, then suddenly, out of the mist, barely fifty yards away, the advancing Germans appeared as thick as flies round a carcase in summer. I had instructed my men to hold their fire until the enemy appeared, and then we poured a deadly hail of steel into the serried ranks of the attackers. I swept my gun from left to right and back again; the slaughter was frightful and, for the time being at any rate, the attackers were foiled. They lay in holes firing Véry lights and their artillery again "knocked hell out of us," as a man near me said, just before he dropped. We crouched again, hugging our guns and, in spite of the shells dropping all round, keeping an eye on the enemy infantry barely a hundred yards distant. As if by magic the shelling ceased, and again the storm troops came at us, some with bayonets, others with bombs. When they came nearer we could hear them shouting, and the ferocious look in their faces boded no good. I prayed that my gun would not jam, and kept on mowing them down until the few survivors broke and fled, dropping into shell holes. Three of my men had been put out of action by a shell, one killed and two wounded.

Just when things looked hopeless a sergeant-major from another regiment brought me about thirty men, the survivors of a company. They all looked extremely haggard



and several had bloody bandages on, which proved that they had been in a hot corner. The situation was too desperate to allow walking wounded to go back, they had to stop and help; it was literally a case of backs to the wall, for an old ruined wall ran behind us and we could not retreat without orders. The sergeant-major told me he was going to collect stragglers, for isolated groups of men were trying to sneak away. He had been forced to shoot two or three to stop the rot. A sorely pressed army is like the water in a reservoir. The first tiny trickle must be stopped at all costs, or it will increase with alarming rapidity until the wall collapses and the mighty flood sweeps everything before it.

The new-comers were in a bad state of funk and one of them was inciting the others to run for it.

"What the hell's the good of sticking here, sergeant?" he cried to me with terror in his voice; "we're all cold meat if Jerry gets us."

"If you run I'll shoot you without hesitation," I replied grimly, "so you may as well wait and be shot by Fritz."

The fellow seemed to have gone mad and rushed at me with his rifle and bayonet, shouting: "Let me get at the bloody murderer!" I thought he was merely trying to intimidate me into retreating or surrendering but, when he was only a few yards away, the mad look in his eyes warned me to adopt drastic measures so, without hesitation, I shot him through the head.

Barely had he dropped when Jerry made another attempt to rush our position. One big officer with a red beard led a most determined attack and came on like a dancing dervish. He kept leaping into the air and seemed to bear a charmed life. The attackers uttered the most blood-curdling yells, and I realized full well that if they reached our position we could expect no quarter. My men fought with the courage of despair; indeed, there was nothing to do but fight to the last, for retreat was impossible and surrender meant death. The sergeant-major who had brought the reinforcements sent me another batch just when I was debating whether I would blow out my brains or let the Germans do it.

The big officer was an expert at attacking over open ground, for he led his men in short rushes, and dropped down with them every fifteen or twenty yards. Their last rush brought them within a dozen yards of our trench, and I fully expected their next rush to carry them in on top of us. Again luck favoured us, for we had a large supply of Mills bombs and my bombers threw them with such effect that the Germans broke and fled; I mowed them down as they ran. The tall officer alone scorned death and, with a flying leap, landed on top of us, but his body was riddled and all the damage he did was to flatten two men under him as he fell. I bent over him and detected a strong smell of alcohol; he had probably taken enough to make him laugh at death.

All day long the battle raged. We were completely isolated and for my part I never thought it possible to come out of that battle alive. We suffered much from hunger and thirst; at night I had to walk about to keep awake and was not surprised to find my sentries asleep; human endurance has its limits. The following day was a repetition of what we had already endured, and we beat off sporadic assaults until the ground in front was carpeted with dead. The wounded groaned and shrieked but we could give them no help. Flame-throwers were sent against us late in the evening of the second day, but we riddled them before they reached us and they lay like flaming torches. One got near enough to direct his flame on us, and one of my men was so badly burnt that he died later after great agony. I had lost my cap, and my uniform was torn owing to crawling about among barbed wire. The blood from the cut over my eye had dried on my face and came off in powder each time I touched it.

After holding our position for forty hours against the fiercest massed attacks by troops who outnumbered us by at least ten to one when the battle started, we received the order to withdraw into the village behind us. Fritz swept the ground with such concentrated machine-gun fire that we had to creep on our bellies like snakes; even so I lost several men.

When we reached the ruins I found Captain Ewen lying

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on a stretcher with only one boot protruding ; he had lost a leg below the knee. We compared notes and he told me the battalion had been practically wiped out. The most utter confusion reigned, and all we knew was that Fritz was making the greatest attempt of the war to smash our line and reach the sea, rolling up the entire British army in the process. Practically all our officers had been wiped out and the situation was as black as it could possibly be. If we could hold the enemy another day or two his great attack was bound to fail, as our sadly thinned ranks would be reinforced and fresh troops would, in due course, take our places.

There was but little sleep that night, the few officers and N.C.O.s available working like galley slaves to sort out the men, for all regiments were mixed up. We placed our riflemen and bombers in the best positions and kept the sentries on the *qui vive*, while men too tired to keep awake slept like logs. In the middle of the night Ewen was taken away and the next time I met him was a month later in Salisbury, where he spent several months in hospital. Just before dawn I was ordered to brigade H.Q. to report on the situation. The brigadier was a man of about sixty with white hair. He asked me a number of questions about the fighting, the state of our sector, and so on. Messages were coming in from different battalions and while I was there the H.Q. was preparing to move back.

I was returning to the line when a general stopped me and put me in command of a crowd of men he had collected. They belonged to all regiments, including R.F.A., A.S.C., and road gangs. We lined a ditch and were told to hold it at all costs. When day came numbers of our wounded came hobbling back and Fritz shot them down repeatedly. The situation was so perplexing that I could not make head or tail of it. We didn't even know if any of our own troops were in front of us, and could see none on our flanks. The general disappeared with a last injunction that there was to be no retreat without orders, and we were left to our own devices. Still the wounded were hobbling back and were shot down like rabbits ; crazy with pain and exhaustion they made no attempt to take cover, and simply stumbled

on until a bullet in a vital spot put them down for good.

Four of our tanks came near us with their noses pointing east. A hand waved to us from each and they disappeared in the smoke that obscured the terrain. They contained brave men going to certain death. I had fallen asleep in spite of superhuman efforts to keep awake and was awakened by a burst of firing. We had two Lewis guns in action and I jumped up, thinking the enemy were on top of us. Then I realized what a ghastly blunder my men had made; seeing a line of men appear suddenly on the crest in front they opened fire, and discovered too late that the supposed enemies were the remnants of one of our own battalions who were falling back after a most gallant resistance.

In the evening orders came to retire and we went back about half a mile. Just before dark a number of teams dashed forward to save the guns, but, without exception, they were mown down by the machine-guns that Fritz pushed forward with unrelenting determination. That night was a nightmare; shells and bullets swept over us without ceasing and we were bombed from the air.

At dawn a sergeant staggered into our position with blood streaming from a wound in his face. He was the sole survivor of his platoon, and had been taken prisoner, but escaped in the confusion. A machine-gun detachment in front of us sent back a message that their ammunition was almost exhausted, and I volunteered with a dozen men to carry some boxes forward. How we reached them I shall never know. We ran a few yards and dropped, while bullets buzzed overhead like bees round a hive. Great coal-boxes came down with colossal crumps, and we dodged like hunted hares, hoping to avoid the bursts that numbed our brains. The earth yawned all round us, and I fell into a new shell hole, where I lay a few minutes, trying to gather my scattered wits. On we ran panting, sweating, and cursing like lunatics. Four of my men were killed, but we reached the machine-gunners and handed over our burdens.

The journey back was, if possible, worse, for Fritz had pushed forward guns on each flank, and they swept the ground trying to wipe us out. One of my men lost his

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head, stood up, and ran. After covering a dozen yards he pitched forward and lay still. With the help of three others I brought in a captain who had been shot in the stomach ; although in great pain he was calm enough, and told me he was the only officer left out of his company.

When we got back to our own line I discovered that a bullet had gone clean through my left hand, but, owing to terror that verged on lunacy, I had not noticed it before. For the first time I fully understood the meaning of the lines :

"Till I 'eard a beggar squealin' out for quarter as 'e ran,  
An' I thought I knew the voice—an' it was me!"

On our right Fritz was almost behind us, and we were in grave danger of being cut off. A battery of heavy guns kept firing point-blank at the advancing German infantry, until the attackers got past the fire of the big guns and wiped out the gunners. Those Garrison Artillery gunners were brave men and their deed was worthy of the highest praise. We retreated to a rising piece of ground to avoid being cut off, and watched the Germans pouring into the abandoned huts and tents. There was a canteen with many barrels of beer, and a large Y.M.C.A. hut, which were soon full of invaders intent on loot. When no more could get inside we opened fire on the wooden buildings with massed machine-guns and hardly a man escaped.

Flocks of our planes came over and attacked the enemy with bombs and machine-guns, doing exceptionally fine work ; they saved our line at a critical period, for the Germans were so demoralized that they fled wildly in all directions. A group of 18-pounder guns, on the hill behind us, blazed away at the panic-stricken Jerries and completed the confusion.

Prodigious deeds of heroism were done by the worn-out remnants of the battered Fifth Army, which was so bitterly traduced by an ignorant press. They fell back slowly, taking heavy toll of the enemy, and undergoing privations such as few armies have endured before or since. There was practically no time to eat or sleep, and for three days we had been without a square meal. Some men had to be

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kicked into wakefulness, or they would have slept under the feet of the advancing Germans.

At noon a bold airman came low and started raking us with bursts from his guns. He was a good shot and wiped out a group of my men, while we fired at him from all our guns. I was blazing away with my Lewis gun, supported by a wall, when Fritz returned to the attack and, heedless of danger, came so low that I could see his head. Suddenly I felt a hot stinging pain in my right shoulder and my gun fell from my grip. Almost at the same instant the plane got a burst in the petrol tank and engine, with the result that it crashed in flames.

I felt that my collar-bone was broken by a bullet that had gone in just above it, and the blood oozing down my back told me where it had come out, just below the shoulder-blade. More from exhaustion than pain I fainted, and, during the few minutes that I remained unconscious, had a miraculous escape. A heavy shell burst a few yards from me, and I opened my eyes to find that I was buried up to the shoulders in soft earth that the shell had disturbed. A heavy machine-gun barrage forced my companions to retreat, and I was left wondering how long it would be before the Germans reached me. That day seemed endless, but at last it drew to a close, and the Vêry lights showed that the enemy were barely two hundred yards away. Only my head was above ground, but I managed to get the left arm out; the right was too painful to move. I was nearly mad with thirst and weak from lack of food. I watched the red slashes in the sky as shells burst intermittently. Jean was watching me and telling me not to lose heart . . . after another fainting fit I heard a whisper, and the voice of little Buxton sounded like sweet music in my ears:

"'Ere y'are, sergeant, put yer gob ter this," and he held a water-bottle to my mouth. I took a gulp of rum and it burnt my mouth like fire. In my weak state it made me drunk, and I started to sob. My head ached as if it had been beaten with hammers and I talked stupidly:

"For God's sake leave me, Buxton, I'm finished."

"No bloody fear, not me, sergeant. I saw a Fritz stick

'is bayonet into a wounded corporal to-day, and 'ow d'yer know they won't do the same to you? "

Buxton had a little body but a big heart. He was stronger than many tall men, but so ungainly that he always reminded me of the dwarf Quasimodo in Hugo's famous novel. Regardless of flying bullets he pulled me out of the ground, and somehow hoisted me across his back, although I was no light weight. My left hand was stiff and swollen, but I managed to clutch him with it, and we were getting along nicely when he pitched headlong into a deep shell hole. The pain in my right shoulder made me groan while my rescuer picked himself up:

"Sorry, sergeant, accidents will 'appen in the best-regulated societies, yer know. We'll live in 'ope if we die in bloody despair. If we 'adn't pitched in 'ere yer might 'ave 'ad a bullet in yer! "

After more staggering across broken country we came upon a tank that appeared to be going back for repairs, for a shell had damaged one side. Buxton asked the crew to take me back which they promised to do. The gallant lad left me with a joke; he was killed in the attack on the Hindenburg Line, September 29.

The tank was hot and smelt of oil and petrol. It could only crawl along owing to the damage. Occasionally bullets rained on the iron side and I cowered instinctively, although there was no immediate danger of my hide being further punctured. Dawn found us on the road to Péronne, and I was transferred to a G.S. waggon. The confusion on that road was so colossal that we could only progress at the rate of about a mile an hour. Wounded, walking and in ambulances, were drifting back as far as the eye could see. Reinforcements were coming towards us, staff men, orderlies, cooks and non-combatants of all kinds, hurriedly pressed into service.

Guns forced us off the road and we went into the ditch, where we remained for hours, nobody taking the slightest notice. There were about twenty wounded with me in the cart, some lying, others sitting up, but all helpless. The driver was unable to do much single-handed, although he lashed the horses in a vain attempt to extract us from our

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plight. At length a Scottish infantry officer came to our aid and, with his men, lifted the wagon. The never-ending stream of ambulances showed the extent of our casualties, and I began to think the war was over and that Fritz had won it. A man at my side had been hit in the head, and shouted with insensate fury; another had a bullet touching the spine and shrieked with pain every time the cart jolted. Several were so still and bloody that I should have thought them dead, had they not moaned at long intervals.

"O mother, I'm dying," sobbed one of my companions.

"Shut up, for Christ's sake," remonstrated another, "you won't peg out yet; you shout too bloody loud for that."

My whole body ached, and I was very feverish when we reached Péronne. The cart stopped outside a building that looked as if it had been a civilian hospital, and, after a long wait, we were carried in on stretchers. I was left lying in a hall packed with wounded, swathed in bloody bandages, and plastered with mud and earth. A few wounded Germans were in one corner, and one of them, seeing me watching them, brought me a cigarette. We conversed with difficulty, for I felt dazed, and found it more than usually difficult to formulate phrases in a tongue I rarely used. He was a Saxon, tall and loose-limbed; with his blue eyes and fair hair he could have passed for an Englishman. He told me he had been sent forward, with an officer and other men, to attack an English trench. The officer was shot dead and the men, all wounded, surrendered. Two or three of the others came over and shook hands. They were glad to be out of the fighting but apprehensive about their safety, having been told that the English shot all prisoners. They showed me photographs of their families and gave me cigars.

At night bombs and shells dropped into the town, so orderlies and prisoners carried us down into the cellar for safety. In the middle of the night a doctor came round with a nurse, to ascertain the nature of each man's wounds and tie a label on our jackets. Next day I was lying near the door, and heard an R.A.M.C. sergeant whisper to an ambulance driver that he did not think all the wounded



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could be evacuated. Not a few had succumbed, but the place was still crowded. I had a horror of falling into the hands of the enemy after getting so far:

"Can't you take me?" I asked the ambulance man as he passed.

"You must wait your turn," he replied without stopping.

Weak and ill as I was, I struggled to my feet and staggered to the door. An ambulance stood with the engine ticking, ready to start. The doors were open so I climbed in and sat on the floor. When the attendant came round, to shut the doors, he tried to put me off, but I refused to move:

"Come on, sergeant, you'll 'ave ter get out of 'ere."

"You'll have to put me out," I croaked.

"But it's against regulations."

"B—— the regulations. You have room here and you are going to carry me, so let us not waste time arguing."

Muttering that he would get into trouble, he went to the front, and, to my intense relief, we drove off.

I felt I was going to die and at certain moments would have welcomed death. My wounds were throbbing and a fever made me light-headed. When the vehicle jolted over a rough bit of road I nearly fainted.

After a fainting fit I became more conscious of what was going on round me. I realized what a damned soul would feel in passing from hell to heaven, should there ever be granted any pardons for good conduct after a few centuries in Satan's abode. We passed through a quiet village that had escaped the shells. It was strange to see children playing in front of the dwellings, and old men sitting enjoying the rays of a feeble sun. Everything was so peaceful and lovely after the horrors I had endured. A young matron was chasing her child of six or so for having tied a tin can to the dog's tail. The animal ran about the street with the can clanking behind it. The mother was fat and could not catch the child, who was as elusive as an elf, so she threatened him from afar while the culprit laughed gleefully. The most banal things became invested with great beauty. Having passed through the valley of the shadow of death I realized, as never before, the mysterious

appeal and sacred nature of the simple things in life. My eyes had grown keener and my soul more sensitive to the romance that permeates the most mundane things if we only know how to look for it.

I watched the road winding away in the distance past farms and hayricks. As the ambulance car followed the sudden turns in the road, the fields seemed to dance from one side to the other. We stopped suddenly, and the whistle of an engine told me that it was a level crossing. A merry-faced little boy pushing a barrow came close to the car and offered me a big red apple from which he had taken a bite. I thanked him and refused until he looked sad and said: "*J'en ai une autre dans ma poche*," so I took the gift and ate it with relish, for I was starving. The taste of food made me ravenous, and, pulling a five-franc note from my pocket, I asked the lad to fetch some bread and butter from the shop opposite. He returned with some thick slices of home-made bread and a little carton of butter. I gave him a couple of francs and he thanked me profusely with the naïve comment: "You must be very rich to give me so much money." He was such a bright little chap, with such an intelligent look, that I was sorry to feel the car start again. My little friend waved until he was out of sight, a sturdy figure at the side of a barrow that looked much too big for him.

In the evening we reached Amiens, having been delayed for a long time by engine trouble. In a narrow street we broke down again almost opposite a red lamp, outside which a large group of soldiers were standing.

When we reached the hospital it was full, but we were accommodated in a marquee on a piece of waste ground. There were no beds and we lay just as we came out of the battle, with our blood-stained uniforms and dirty shirts. One nurse worked heroically washing the groaning men, who numbered at least a hundred. A little before dawn a doctor came in and gave us all the anti-tetanus injection. Later in the day soup was brought, and we consumed it greedily. A man near me who had been marked for Blighty died in the course of the day, and I saw a Jock take the dead man's ticket and exchange it for his own. When he

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saw me watching him he smiled and winked, then went back to his stretcher. I hope his ruse succeeded.

After dark I was taken away with others to a hospital train and, after a quiet journey, found myself in Calais. The chaplain remembered me and came for a chat. He must have been a sensible fellow, for, although he wore his dog collar, he talked like a human being, and did not ask me if I were saved. Cards were sent to Jean and my parents. They must have worried a great deal as I had not been able to write for about ten days, and they had read of the debacle to my army.

I was bathed and given clean clothes, then put into a bed with white sheets, where I slept for two days without waking for anything, except meals and dressings. The wounds were clean but they had to be probed and sterilized. There were men all round me with the most ghastly wounds and their agony was incessant. It was a depressing sight, for most of them were doomed. One big Australian had been shot in six places and had tubes hanging over the side of the bed draining off the pus. His lungs had to be drained periodically, as the blood from wounds percolated into them, and threatened to choke him. To do the draining they made holes in his back, and the stoic stuck it without a moan, although others less severely wounded bellowed every time they were touched. On the whole the men bore their martyrdom with commendable fortitude, and it was rare for anyone to complain.

I was in that hospital a week and was glad to leave it, as too many died there ; it must have been unlucky. There was a Russian in the next bed ; he had enlisted in the Canadians, and now lay with a fractured leg that was to be amputated as soon as he gained enough strength. He gabbled in Russian when the pain made the sweat stand out on his brow, then turning to me he said : " This mucking war no bloody bon, eh ? " to which I replied that I was in hearty agreement.

On the third morning after my arrival letters came, and I read Jean's over and over again, then I stuck it under my pillow and dreamt about it ; when I woke I read it again. It was the outpouring of her heart in a pæan of love and

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thanksgiving for my safety. She passed through some dark days when news was bad, and little hope was entertained for my safety, except that there was a possibility of my being a prisoner. The worst was when she was officially informed that I was missing, believed killed.

Our crossing to England was uneventful, but we had a fright at Clapham Junction for, while we lay on stretchers in the open, a number of German planes came over on a bombing raid in broad daylight.

"Gawd! fancy being blotted aht 'ere after comin' all this way," muttered a fellow at my side, and he expressed my feelings too. The bombs dropped in different parts of the city, but none came near us. It was evening when we reached a town in Surrey and were placed in a hospital that looked like a workhouse. A lady doctor was in charge and as far as I could judge she ran the place efficiently on the medical side, although her presence in the ward provoked remarks that would have made her blood curdle had she heard them. The grub was vile and we made complaints almost daily, but nothing was done.

## CHAPTER XXVII

JEAN came down next day with my mother. Both wept when they saw me, for the cut over my eye was covered with plaster, my right arm was strapped to my side, and my left hand swathed in bandages. They said I looked pale and ill.

"Are you suffering much, darling?" asked Jean as she sat at my side and stroked my hair.

"No, dear, a few days' rest with plenty of sleep and good food will make me as fit as a fiddle."

"Will you be able to use your hand?"

"The doctor says no bones or sinews have been severed, and that, although I may not be able to straighten the fingers for a long time, no permanent injury has been done."

Mother went round giving cigarettes and a few novels to the men, and while she was away Jean said: "I don't care who is looking," and pressed her lips to mine. Putting her bag on my bed she put her hands in mine and whispered:

"Do you still love me, darling?"

"I love you more than life itself."

"How long will it be before you are allowed out?"

"Not long, a couple of weeks at most."

"What glorious times we shall have when you can come out for walks. Spring is in the air, flowers line the woodland paths, the birds chirp and sing in the branches, all nature is full of joy, and responds to the love that fills our hearts."

Just as mother came back the nurse announced that visitors had to depart. She said father could not get away but would come as soon as possible. When they had gone, an Australian, who had been gassed, came in from a walk, crawled into bed, and died without a word.

Next morning after breakfast a wire arrived for me and,

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when I tore it open, the words danced before my blurred sight : " Father seriously ill. Prepare for the worst."

The shocked numbed me, for it was so utterly unexpected. Like a craven I prayed that my father might be spared, at least until I could go to him, for I could not imagine him dying before I could be at his side. At five in the evening another wire came with a brief message telling me that he had passed away. I could not weep, but I lay all night in black despair, quite unable to sleep. My brain refused to accept the position that I would never see my father again. I kept muttering to myself : " Father's dead, O my God, what shall I do ? "

Next day Jean came down, and told me that father had been knocked down by a bus, as he was hurrying to catch a train to come and see me. They took him to a hospital at once and he lingered for a few hours. When mother rushed to his bedside he was no longer conscious and passed away without a word. Mother was in bed suffering from mental prostration, and for some days it was feared that she would die of grief.

I asked for permission to attend the funeral, but it was refused me at first on the grounds of weakness. However, I insisted, and urged that if they persisted in their refusal I would worry so much that my recovery would be retarded. With much reluctance permission was granted, and an orderly dressed me. I was almost too weak to stand, but pretended there was nothing the matter. That day was a long-drawn-out agony. Mother was raving, and, if Jean and a friend of hers had not supported me, I should have fallen into the grave.

Jean had intended booking a room at an hotel in the town, but felt she ought not to leave mother, who was still desperately ill. However, she came down every day, and, as soon as I could get up, we went out for walks. For days my legs refused to perform their office, I was as weak as a child. At first we hired an open cab and drove to a number of beauty spots in the neighbourhood. We would leave the conveyance at the side of the road, and the old bearded driver smoked and dozed until we returned. Those walks through the woodland glades among the buds and flowers

were so delightful that we hardly spoke, just sauntered hand in hand, until we sat on a log or mould, and admired the vista that stretched glorious and impressive before us.

One day we were taking tea at a gorgeous corner looking across the valley. Jean had been rather wistful, and when I asked her what was troubling her she could no longer restrain her tears, and sobbed :

"Will you have to go back to France?"

"Let us not think of such things, beloved," I answered, putting my sound arm round her and pressing my lips on hers.

Jean then put her hands over my eyes and whispered :

"Please promise me something, darling."

"But how can I until I know what it is?"

"Well, it's something you can do."

"Very well."

"You are going to promise me that you will apply for a commission and that will keep you in England for a few months."

"I have promised, but you know how I detest the idea."

"Why don't you want to be an officer, dearest?"

"Because I have served in the ranks so long that I should feel I were deserting my companions. There are undoubtedly many fine officers, but the addle-brained nincompoop with three hairs on his upper lip, who thinks he is an ornament to the service, riles me so much that if I were a fellow officer I should find it almost impossible to be polite."

"But the men are terribly rough and uncouth, are they not?"

"They are, dearest Jean, but they are also sublime in their stoicism, comradeship and dogged courage, under conditions so ghastly that civilians will never be able to visualize them. The officer is given too much consideration, the private too little. The private is usually nothing more than a number, an anonymous hero whose work is never done, whereas the officer with his servant and leisure has an infinitely easier time on the whole."

"I do wish you would apply, for I would love to see you in officer's uniform."

"Fine feathers make fine birds, darling."

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"If there are no other reasons against being an officer I rule that those put forward are not valid," laughed Jean, kissing my eyes.

"Probably I'm too democratic. I want no man to clean my boots, polish my buttons, and dislocate his arm saluting all day long. I've seen so many idiotic officers that I'm prejudiced."

In the end it was definitely decided that I should apply for a commission, and I set about it with a secret hope that I should be turned down. I had to get hold of an officer to sign my form. The bank refused to supply me with Captain Ewen's address, but intimated their willingness to forward any letters. My old company commander returned the form signed, and at the same time wrote me a long letter. He was getting on as well as he could expect, but was rather depressed at the idea of a wooden leg as he had been a good athlete.

When I was discharged from hospital after six weeks' treatment, I was granted the usual leave which had been increased to ten days. Jean suggested the Lake District and we enjoyed every minute of our stay there, boating, climbing and walking. At the end of each day we were healthily tired, and sat at our window watching the lake in the moonlight. Jean sat on my knees as of old with her arms round my neck. One night we walked to the village two miles away, and when we were in our room Jean said she felt faint. Her face was rather pale and drawn. I was alarmed and suggested fetching a doctor.

"Please don't worry, darling, I shall be quite all right in a minute."

"Have you any pain, darling?"

Jean smiled and said:

"Come to the window, darling husband, I have a secret to tell you."

It was only then that I realized the cause of her pallor and languor.

"Are you glad, little husband?"

I was too surprised and happy to say anything. It was the consummation of our love, what I had wished for in secret without daring to hope that it would come to



pass. In an instant I felt I had been transformed from a boy into a man. Taking Jean in my arms I kissed her passionately, and we remained in a close embrace while the big pale moon climbed and was reflected in the placid waters of the lake.

At the expiration of my leave I was again ordered to Ripon, and Jean took rooms in the town. I duly presented my application for a commission and, after waiting a week, was informed that at the moment there were vacancies in the Air Force only. I had always been attracted by the idea of flying, but Jean was not at all pleased with the prospect, and only consented when I pointed out that the war would probably be over before my training finished and that, if I refused the offer, I should have to return to the trenches in a very short time. It seemed to me also that the war in the air was less horrible than on the ground as far as hardships were concerned. Death in a crash seemed terrible indeed, but better than lying shattered on a bed of pain. Besides, if one were going to crash in flames one had always the means of putting an end to one's misery. I had watched too many machines falling in flames to harbour any delusions, but the thought of flying was too fascinating to resist and I proceeded to collect the requisite documents. I had to produce certificates for academic proficiency, and statements as to character from parsons and schoolmasters whom I had not seen for four years. After another wait I was summoned to the orderly room and told to proceed to Leeds for an interview.

Jean came with me and waited in the street, while I knocked at the door of the address given me, and an orderly took me to a room where a captain sat behind a desk. He had an intelligent head and was about forty. The following conversation took place:

"So you want to fly?"

"Yes, sir."

"Why?"

"Because it must be rather thrilling, and having had enough of the war on the ground I would like to experience what it's like in the air."

"Can you drive a car?"

"Yes, but not expertly."

"Play games?"

"Rugby and cricket."

"You have been wounded several times. Have your nerves been affected?"

"They have been badly shaken at different times, but I think they are normal again."

"Air-fighting is strenuous work. Do you think you can do it?"

"Well, sir, if I hadn't thought so I wouldn't have come here."

After some desultory conversation I was informed that the next step was the medical examination; if I passed I should be sent to a cadet school.

We spent the remainder of the day exploring the town, some parts of which were extremely squalid. In the evening we went to a theatre, as I had permission to be away from camp until next day. The medical examination took place at Hampstead and was rather severe. After spending a whole day going from room to room and performing all manner of tests, I was informed that I had satisfied the requirements.

My next journey was to a cadet school near Folkestone. Jean stayed in London until I was able to secure accommodation and came down two days later.

The cadets wore a white band round the hat and were housed in a collection of huts. I was posted to what was known as a flight, and told to take down my stripes, for all cadets were equal. Some of my companions were straight from school, but a great many had, like me, transferred from other regiments. The huts were clean, and there were cloths on the tables in the dining-rooms, where we were waited on by W.A.A.C.s who were, in the main, a pretty lot of wenches, and spent most of their time when off duty flirting with officers and cadets.

The officers and N.C.O.s were all from the infantry and nearly all had been wounded. The officer in charge of our flight was a handsome young fellow, not more than twenty-one, with three wounded badges. He was a great hit with the girls and fully aware of the fact. They peeped through

the windows of the dining hut while he strutted about supervising the drill and cursing our slackness. It seemed to me idiotic to mix us up higgledy-piggledy, so that recruits who had never done any drill were between veterans who knew their drill inside out. The result was endless confusion, and we had to repeat, a score of times, movements that many of us could have executed with our eyes shut.

The only part of the day I enjoyed was the evening, for I had permission to sleep out, and Jean was always waiting for me as soon as drills were over. We had a room in a lovely inn about a mile from the camp, and every evening, except when I was on duty, we dined together and had glorious walks in the pretty surrounding countryside. Jean was supremely happy, although occasionally she betrayed her anxiety, and prayed that the war would soon be over. Sometimes, as we sat at our window overlooking the flower-garden, she thought she could detect the distant reverberation of the guns; then she would clutch my arm and whisper that she would not let me go back.

"It isn't fair, darling; you've done your share, let others do theirs."

"War is a hard taskmaster, dearest little wife, easy to start but terribly difficult to stop."

"Oh, Wilfred, I shall not live if you are killed."

"Don't worry, beloved, I am not going to get killed. I'm a tough old bird and have as many lives as a cat."

I went to the piano and played while Jean sang. We preferred simple sentimental melodies; in those days our favourite was "I know of two bright eyes," a delightful song that Jean sang with infinite sweetness and feeling. To-day people resent the term sentimental almost as a term of abuse; it is positively insulting to be called sentimental. The difficulty is of course that the word cannot be accurately defined, and is often used to describe that sloppy, maudlin, sickly attitude that is so nauseating. But let us not forget that playing on the tender emotions can also be the most wonderful experience in this matter-of-fact world. The emotional reactions of the mob are usually crude; easily provoked by a mawkish film for example. That is probably due to the fact that the mob are emotionally starved. But

there are of course times when the expression of strong and simple emotion is proof not of sentimentality, but of life. How could a young wife, expecting to become a mother and anticipating her husband's return to the front, be other than emotional? And how could he in his turn, when confronted by the prospect of leaving the one he loved more than life, and knowing full well the perils that awaited him, repress the strong emotions that welled up in him so imperiously?

Soon after my arrival at the camp a Rugby football club was started, and we discovered some useful players; the New Zealanders were good exponents of the code and very enthusiastic. After a few trial games we defeated the other camps and looked for fresh foes to conquer.

A regiment stationed at the coast was reputed to have a redoubtable team, and, without delay, accepted our challenge. The match was to take place on a Saturday afternoon, and after lunch I was putting my things together, when a voice cried from the doorway: "Telegram for Saint-Mandé." My heart sank and I feared the worst. Duncan had been in the habit of writing regularly to me for some time, but two weeks had passed without any news, and a wire could mean only one thing. I tore it open, hoping desperately that I was mistaken. My eyes took in the message in a fraction of a second: "Duncan killed. Mother seriously ill."

The letters did not dance, my eyes did not get blurred, I simply walked to a latrine—the only place where I was certain of privacy—and locked myself in. How long I sat there I shall never know. With bowed head I tried to realize that never more should I see my youngest brother. I could not think clearly, crushed and overwhelmed by black despair. Although I could not weep my heart came near to breaking that day. The happy days together, the games, the walks, the fun and happy laughter, all had gone for ever. I had no faith, no hope that we might ever meet again; the grave was the end.

Like a man in a dream I heard my name called, and went out to find the captain of our team, a big burly New Zealander. He refused to release me from my promise to play,

and pointed out that it was as wise to play as to mope and grieve. After much hesitation I agreed to play, but knew full well that I would be more of a hindrance than a help to my side. The journey to the coast was by lorry, and I listened to the songs and quips of my companions as a prisoner, sentenced to a long term, listens to the birds singing in the branches near his cell.

Of the match there is little to say. Our opponents were a most formidable lot and trounced us badly. I played as if I were in a trance and did everything mechanically. One refrain kept surging through my fuddled brain, and as I ran I kept repeating: "Duncan is dead, Duncan is dead, Duncan is dead." Blows and kicks came my way, but I felt nothing; it was only the day after the match, when the bruises were swollen and discoloured, that I realized how rough the match had been. At the tea which followed the match our opponents told us a secret. They had heard that we included in our ranks several "All Black" players, so they scoured the country and raked in seven internationals.

Jean had gone to comfort mother, and I obtained a few days' special leave. For days we thought mother would not recover; she appeared to have no desire to live, and had to be coaxed to take the lightest nourishment. I spent many hours every day in her room, and read chapter after chapter from the Bible at her request, wishing I could believe what I was reading. When my few days were up I returned to camp, but Jean stayed behind, for we felt mother was too ill to be left with a strange nurse.

I became friendly with a South African in my hut. He had never seen London, so I offered to show him the sights during the week-end. He was amazed at the slums with abject poverty and squalor written everywhere. He wanted to see a bad slum so I took him to some of the worst parts of Stepney, with its hordes of foreign riffraff and derelicts; criminals and wasters of every conceivable kind.

We went along the Whitechapel Road, and, in Limehouse, saw two rival gangs fighting with knives. It was after dark, and in the black narrow alleys screams and oaths were frequent. Outside a sinister-looking pub, a man kicked a woman in the belly and left her lying in the gutter, while

he disappeared into some foul hole. Filthy, ragged brats, were playing in the stinking gutters, while the mothers with brutal, misshapen, discoloured faces, that spoke eloquently of drink and prostitution, drank their beer and spirits round the pub doors. One child of about two years old fell and cut his brow; when he ran crying to his mother she struck it violently and sent it prostrate in the gutter. Two policemen came along and advised us to clear out of the district.

We asked them to take us for a look round, and gave them a pound each. They took us to dens that were too foul to describe. One cheap doss-house consisted of a large room with bunks round the walls. The lodgers were, as far as I could see, all foreigners of the lowest class. One lay on his face drunk, and his supper, which he had vomited, covered the filthy floor near him. The Chinese proprietor sat reading, and one of the coppers greeted him with: "Well, you old b——, what the hell have you got here to-night?"

The yellow head looked up and smiled but said nothing. The police knew him as an expert "fence" or receiver of stolen goods, and he harboured some of the worst criminals in that part of London. The police explained that, when a crime was committed, they could tell almost at once which criminals would be likely to do such a deed, and the haunts of such lags were immediately combed. When a suspect disappeared from his usual abode it showed that he "was on a job" and was hunted ruthlessly until he fled the country or was laid by the heels. Savage heads were raised from the dark and wretched bunks covered with the vilest rags. One group played cards on an upturned box, and stopped a drunken quarrel as we walked in. A repulsive creature, who was a cross between a negro and a Chinaman, leered at us from the fire, where he was cooking some dish with an unbearable stink.

The whole district was, and perhaps still is, a disgusting sore on the face of London. In the daytime the alleys were almost deserted, save for a few ghastly females gossiping at their doors or hurling abuse at each other, across the narrow space between the hovels. There was hardly a single pane in one alley, all the window spaces were boarded or stuffed

with paper. Clothes lines hung across between the dens, for they cannot be termed houses. The police told us that Jack the Ripper had most of his victims in the streets through which we had passed.

We entered a pub with sand on the floor, and watched the most abandoned prostitutes drinking with foreign sailors and pimps of the lowest class. Those who have never been in the slums would not believe the human face capable of such degradation. Almost without exception the faces of both sexes were spotted and pimply, many were purple, others hideously pale with pockets under the eyes. No animal could ever look as horrible as the wrecks we saw that night.

Walters, the South African, was like a man who, having been blind for many years, suddenly recovers his sight. He missed nothing, and, when we returned to the West End via the Embankment, where bundles of rags were sleeping on seats, he said he wanted a bath in a strong disinfectant. For a long time we could not get the smell of the slums out of our nostrils, our very clothes seemed to smell. I took Walters home, and after a thorough scrubbing we sat smoking in the sitting-room, while Jean sat talking to mother. I could see that Walters was bursting to talk and as soon as he lit his pipe, he started:

"Tell me why the hell you send thousands of pounds yearly to save the poor blacks in South Africa when you have here in this great city the foulest slums in the world? Think of the hungry bare-footed kids and the pestilential hovels they exist in. Why don't the British people put their own house in order, clean up this cancer that makes one blush for shame?"

"Perhaps it's because the slum dwellers are Christians while the niggers are heathens," I suggested.

"Christ Almighty," exclaimed Walters with some heat, "charity begins at home. Do you know those people come out to our country, tell the nigger he is as good as the white man, and do a hell of a lot of harm. Damn it all, man, you cannot ram such a religion down the throat of primitive blacks, who have no power of abstract thought. In their kraals they are perfectly happy and honest. A Christian native is as a rule the laziest, most untruthful

swab you could imagine. In any case his own religion suits him perfectly, yet you waste all this money that could be so well used in clearing up some of these bloody awful slums."

As a result of further conversation it struck me that the whites in South Africa were alarmed at the prospect of the negro ever claiming economic justice, for the inflated wages paid to white artisans depended for their continuance on negro serfdom.

Also the farmers were insisting on semi-slave labour, and no government dared resist the backveld. Most South Africans I have met are admirable fellows, but positively see red when one mentions the Native problem. They are extremely touchy about it and resent any attempt of an outsider to discuss the matter, although the outsider often sees things in a truer perspective than the man who is South African born.

Walters told me a good deal about the country, much of which I had heard from others. His mother was Dutch, his father Scotch. According to him, the Afrikaner is a curious person, religious in a narrow, intolerant way, lacking a sense of humour, and very vindictive. Walters lectured in a university college where the laboratory equipment was nil, yet students obtained every year the degree of B.Sc. Water was not laid on, and, after a simple experiment, a Kaffir took the tin outside and emptied it.

"Have you ever heard of *predikants*?" asked Walters after a lull in the conversation.

"I have been told that they are Dutch Reformed Church ministers, but I know very little about them," I answered.

"They are the real rulers of South Africa," he continued. "An uncle of mine was one, but he dared to proclaim from the pulpit that the 1914 rebellion was wrong. He was hounded from his church and died in exile of a broken heart. I would rather trust myself to the tender mercies of a gang of brigands than to the Dutch Reformed Church *predikants*. They have no mercy, no charity, no human kindness in their miserable hearts."

We returned to camp by the last train on the Sunday night, and mother was sufficiently better to permit Jean



to accompany me. Walters left us near the camp, and we returned to the inn, where the landlady had put big bunches of flowers in our room and everything ready for tea on the table. While we were waiting for the kettle to boil I went to the piano and persuaded Jean to sing "Love's old sweet song."

The following day I saw a notice on the board announcing that entries were invited for a boxing tournament to be held shortly. My flight wanted to put up as good a show as possible and I was persuaded to enter as a light heavy-weight. For two weeks we trained assiduously, and I won three fights without much difficulty, but, when the final came round, I could see that my opponent was no novice. He had all the characteristic marks of the old bruiser, in addition to being tattooed all over his arms and chest. He was short and thick, with enormous biceps. The contest was in a huge marquee with about a thousand yelling cadets seated round the ring. The contests were of six rounds' duration, and for five I piled up the points with ease. I was much taller than my opponent and outpointed him all along. He did nothing but rush at me like a bull, his arms going like flails.

Before the end of the fight we were both covered with blood, and the crowd were on their feet shouting like mad. My wounds troubled me a little, but not enough to jeopardize my chances, although a powerful hit on the broken jaw would have been painful. In the last round my infuriated antagonist rushed at me with the intention of winning by fair means or foul, and whipped up a low punch to my groin that sure enough put me down for the count. I was in severe pain and could not continue. The referee had no hesitation in disqualifying the other fellow, and the crowd showed their approval in no uncertain manner.

That was the only foul blow in the whole competition, and it was subsequently discovered that my opponent was a professional pugilist. He had not troubled to train, thinking he would easily win without preparation; that was his undoing.

Jean knew nothing about the boxing until it was over and she saw some marks on my face.

"Whatever's the matter, darling? Your face is bruised all over."

"That's nothing, you ought to see the other chap."

"Surely you haven't been fighting?"

"I'm afraid I have, dearest little Jeankin."

"Why did you fight? Please tell me, I'm so frightened."

"It was a boxing competition, beloved."

"But why did you enter?"

"O, just for fun, I suppose."

"Suppose you had been seriously injured?"

"Well, if one always avoided everything that might lead to injury one would never go for a walk, or a swim, or a climb, or anything."

"Well, you are going to promise me now that never again will you enter for a nasty boxing competition," and Jean came and with many kisses coaxed me to promise.

We went for a walk in the twilight, breathing the scented air and listening to the distant notes of a nightingale. We came upon a camp of poor folk with their picturesque rags and Cockney talk. They were cooking the supper, and while the mothers prepared the meal the brats collected sticks for the fires. A little further on we came to a stile, and sat on it watching a flock of cawing rooks winging their way across the darkening sky.

An old farm labourer, grey and bent, wished us a cheery "Good evening" and trudged along to his cottage, where a light had just appeared in the window.

Slowly we wandered home and sat at our casement. Again we discussed our plans for that longed-for time that never came, "after the war." Jean was restless in bed and when I asked her what was the matter she only replied: "I'm sorry, darling, I can't help it, it's stronger than I. Please promise me you won't take any unnecessary risks." I took her in my arms and kissed her lips; her face was wet with tears.

One morning I was informed that a party was being sent to an aerodrome in Wiltshire. Training there was more severe, and for the first time I flew. I was as calm as if it were an everyday occurrence to hear the mechanic shout: "Switch off," "Suck in," and "Contact," while

the pilot repeated the words. The propeller was given a smart swing, the engine roared and the machine taxied along the ground, gathering speed as it went until it rose into the wind. I did not realize we were high above the earth until I looked over the side. When at a suitable height the pilot allowed the pupil to take control and in a very short time I learnt to keep the bus on an even keel, turn, do circuits, and land unaided. Several machines were smashed up by bad landings, and, in one case, I was convinced the pupil did it to avoid passing out, as he had the wind up and did not wish to return to France. Some cadets were forced to do the whole course over again, others were returned to their units as not likely to become efficient airmen.

Some of the instructors were fine fellows who had marvellous records in France. Many had been sent home for a rest as their lives were valuable. One of them whom I got to know quite well had practically every possible award for bravery. He had been in the Air Force from the beginning, and had brought down Germans with revolvers and rifles before anything was known about air-fighting.

I was successful in several solo flights, and, one sunny morning, was put through the tests for my certificate, which I have since lost. After each test I made good landings on the mark or near it, and, when the show was over, I was informed that I was a pukka pilot and felt rather proud, although there was really nothing in it to a man with good nerves and sense of distance, judgment and so on. After graduation one was allowed to take up faster machines, which were far more responsive to the controls, and landed at a much higher speed. Then came cross-country flights and finding one's way back to the aerodrome. One day I missed some telegraph wires by inches and another scraped the branches of a tree. My worst fright was when the machine side-slipped in a turn through losing flying speed and for a few seconds I fell like a brick. One day I lost my way and landed in a field, but the worst shaking was when I smashed the under carriage in a bad landing.

A number of cadets were killed in the aerodrome; the average was two a week. Not a few crashed through



nerves or bad judgment, and we buried them in the local cemetery unless the relatives claimed the body. One of my friends was killed in a curious way. For some unknown reason his machine failed to rise, and, gathering speed, hurtled into a thick hedge where it burst into flames. Another machine burst into flames at about ten thousand feet, and what we found of the cadet would have gone in a baby coffin.

Jean rented a small cottage close to the aerodrome and we had some of the officers and cadets over to dinner at different times. One of the instructors had brought down over thirty Germans and had been wounded by the great Richthofen. This officer, Captain Barlow, was a small man with the hands and feet of a girl. He never spoke of his exploits but we all knew his record. One night he came to dinner and, after Jean had retired, I got him to talk over a glass of port. He confirmed what I already suspected, that there is no more chivalry in the air than on the ground.

"What did you think of Richthofen?" I asked after a pause.

"He was a brave man, handled his plane with great skill and second to none as a shot, but, admitting all that, I still think he has been overrated. There are several factors that must be taken into account when estimating his worth and work. First of all he was lucky in being able to take advantage of the winds which, in France, usually blow from the west. Fighting planes in action naturally drift to the east, and a Hun in difficulties can always land, whereas the British airman has to fight his way back against the wind and a flock of Boches on his tail. Again, Richthofen went about with his famous circus and most of his victims were capable of no serious resistance. It is like a flock of hawks pouncing on a pigeon. As you know, slow and antiquated machines are used for observation and photography. They are usually protected, but, if you have enough machines to engage the escort, the poor old Noah's arks are doomed.

"When Richthofen went up for the last time his circus consisted of two groups of five machines. Brown, the man destined to bag the German, had also ten planes under his command. There had been fifteen, but Major Butler had

disappeared with the leading flight of five. Over the lines, far below Brown and Richthofen, were two ancient R.E.8's taking photographs, and four Fokker triplanes dived on them. The R.E.'s defended themselves bravely enough but the fight was too uneven. Our 'Archies' started blazing away at the Huns and that attracted Brown's attention, and, although he knew the odds against him, he did not hesitate, but dived down into the battle. At least three of the Huns were sent down in flames and the R.E.8's were saved. One of Brown's flight was a youth named May, who picked off a Hun and streaked for home. Before he had gone very far a fast red triplane came down on him, for Richthofen saw what he thought would be another easy victim. May was in desperate straits, for no matter how he twisted and turned the Fokker gained on him. It was then that Brown saw the predicament of his protégé, and dived on to Richthofen's tail. That was how the great German ace met his death, from behind, in the way he had killed so many others.

"How can we talk about chivalry when a fast plane can always shoot down a slow one? Richthofen was always faster than his victims and usually selected novices. Of course he deserves all credit, for it was his business to destroy as many hostile planes as possible without taking undue risks. For a long time the Germans were ahead of us in the matter of equipment. It made me mad to see our fellows shot down daily, simply because the Halberstadt and Albatross scouts could make rings round the obsolete flying tanks and pusher scouts."

We discussed great airmen like Ball, Bishop, McCudden, Hawker and Liddell, whom Barlow had known personally.

I did a lot more flying and became an expert gunner. Barlow had impressed on me that a pilot must be fearless, know something about his engines, and above all be able to shoot straight just a fraction of a second before the other fellow. He pointed out that on both sides there were many pilots who funked a fight, and a cool determined attacker usually found no difficulty in shooting them down in flames. I listened to him very attentively, for he was no theorist, but practised what he preached. One night, three days

before I was due to fly to France, he came to supper and gave me some useful tips.

"You see, Saint-Mandé, in the air more than anywhere else, attack is the best means of defence. Never hesitate, go for your man with the greatest dash possible. When you miss you can clear off, if the odds against you are too great. The will to win is half the battle. Above all, don't start firing too soon, that's always a sign of nerves. Hold your fire until you are so close in that you can't possibly miss. You ought to do well, and I wish you luck."

We were to proceed to France as a squadron in the latest type of Bristol Fighters. My observer was a Lieutenant Burns, who came from the infantry with a good record, having won the M.M. and M.C. He was a stout fellow and I had the greatest confidence in him.

The evening before our departure Jean fainted and became rather hysterical. Supper was out of the question and I put her to bed. She sobbed as if her heart would break, and passed a sleepless night. I did my best to comfort her, saying that I was certain to return, that my luck would hold and so on, but she refused to be comforted until just before dawn, when she grew calm and asked me to forgive her for having been so foolish. Her pillow was wet with tears, and I felt as wretched as I have ever felt in my life. In the morning we pretended to eat some breakfast, after which I held Jean in my arms for a long time, my lips pressed on hers, until I had to tear myself away.

The flight to France was uneventful, and we took up our quarters in an aerodrome about twenty miles behind the lines. As soon as we knew our sector well, we were ordered to do nothing but fight, which meant patrolling on the German side of the lines and looking for trouble. Our job was to fight anything with crosses on it.

We were comfortably installed in a hut with electric lights. We cultivated little gardens and played footer in our spare time. On wet or misty days we had plenty of leisure and I read a large number of books. A month after my arrival at the aerodrome Jean had a son, born at my mother's home. I cannot attempt to describe my feelings. I felt happy and proud, but worried, for the war in the air

was absolutely relentless, and hardly a week passed without at least one of our squadron going west.

We had several indecisive encounters with the enemy, and were getting accustomed to handling our machines in a scrap, when, early one morning, the telephone announced that a number of German triplanes were over the lines. We took off, and, climbing rapidly, were soon above the Jerries. They were apparently intent on destroying some old R.E.8's that were taking photographs of the German trench system. I thought at once of Brown diving on to Richthofen, and hoped we would be as fortunate as the Canadian, for the odds were heavily against us.

There were fifteen enemy planes in three flights of five, and we had only two flights of five. Captain Gibson waggled the wings of his plane and dived to the attack. We followed with the wind screaming through the bracing wires. The Fokkers did not see us until we were right on top of them, and three were sent crashing to earth, two in flames. Then followed a fierce dog-fight; we dived, zoomed upwards, banked, side-slipped, rolled and did every imaginable trick, with a view to getting in a good burst at an enemy plane, while ensuring that no hostile machine could sit on our tails. While my attention was fully occupied with one Fokker, another got in a burst which tore holes in my fabric and smashed part of my instrument board. By a bit of unexpected good luck I was able to outmanœuvre him, and like a flash, was in the fatal position above and behind. Two short bursts finished him, and he went down a roaring furnace. I followed the blazing mass and saw a body drop out.

One of my petrol tanks was leaking and I streaked for home. Some of my wires were shot away, and I was fortunate to make a good landing. There were bullets in almost every part of the plane, and a burst had missed my head by less than an inch. Burns was huddled up and blood dripped from his head and chest. He had been riddled by one of the bursts and death must have been instantaneous. We shot down the Germans and lost none of our machines, although Burns's death was a blow; we had trained together and had become great friends.

Day after day the fighting went on, and at the end of six weeks I was the only member of the original flight left. Most had been killed, although two were missing and there was a possibility that they were prisoners. When the weather made flying impossible we made merry in the mess.

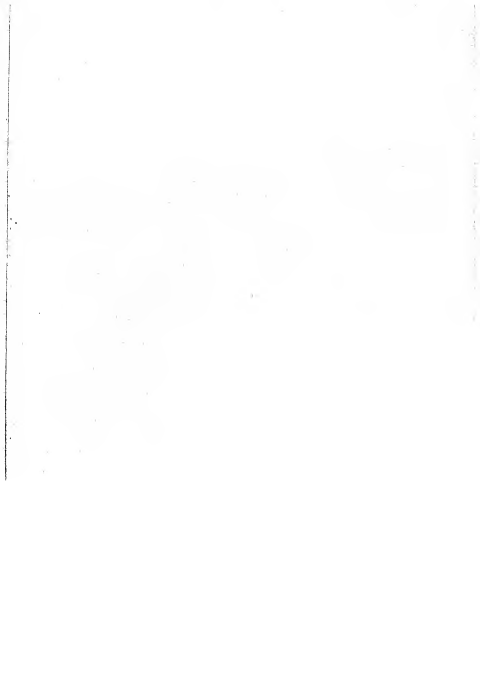
The strain of air fighting began to get on my nerves so that I slept badly, and, when I did get to sleep, after tossing about for hours, woke up in terror thinking I was crashing in flames. Our life consisted of long hours over the enemy lines and moments of intense excitement.

After two days of inaction, owing to bad weather, I went out, with Garth as observer. It was early in the morning, and we were to protect an old machine that was directing artillery fire. Another fighter came with us but had to return with engine trouble. The "Archies" kept blazing away at us, and I was laughing at their abortive efforts, when the rattle of machine-guns warned me that Garth had been careless. However, he seized his gun and, kneeling on his seat, fired like mad at the Fokker behind us. I did every trick I knew and managed to turn the tables on Fritz, so that in a few minutes I was above and behind him. He must have been a novice to lose such a good position, and my first burst at close range raked him to such effect that he went into a nose dive. I followed him down and he fell like a stone, until, at about a thousand feet, he suddenly flattened out and made for home as fast as he could go. But his luck was out, for a well-aimed burst sent him down in flames.

One night a flock of German bombing planes came over and played havoc with our hangars. First of all they dropped incendiary bombs, and then blew the place to hell. I spent an hour of agony in a hole with nothing on but my pyjamas. In the morning the aerodrome looked as if it had been hit by a cyclone. Four machines were wrecked, two officers and ten mechanics killed. A large number of our bombing planes squared matters the following night, when they visited the German aerodrome, and destroyed every plane without loss to themselves, in spite of a hail of shells and machine-gun bullets.

I began to suffer from acute indigestion and for days was





## WAR, WINE AND WOMEN

afraid to touch food, living chiefly on brandy and milk. My nerves were in tatters and I had to take a stiff whisky before I could go up. Day after day we went up and my official victories rose to six. On one occasion my engine gave trouble, and I had to return so low over the lines that a German machine-gun, firing from a trench, put a bullet through my Pitot tube, which registered the altitude.

One morning I got up wondering whether I could carry on or whether I should have to report sick. I had such a fit of depression that I felt something was going to happen, and it did.

We set off early in the morning, seven machines in V-formation. After patrolling at twelve thousand feet, ten miles east of the line, we caught a glimpse of five Fokkers, far below. As we dived to attack, another five came out from behind a cloud, and we realized we were in for a hot time. The usual dog-fight ensued, and at least three German machines went down out of control. One lost a wing and another burst into flames. The fight was at its hottest when I felt my left arm riddled, and it dropped helpless, while I fainted with the pain. When I recovered I had dropped several thousand feet and although weak, from loss of blood, managed to crash in the aerodrome where I fainted again, and was rushed off to hospital. My arm had been smashed by tracer bullets and was immediately amputated.

A fortnight later I was in England, and my sufferings were forgotten when Jean stood at my bedside with the child I had so longed to see. She had given him my name and his lusty cries were as sweet music to my ears.

As soon as I was discharged from hospital and from the army, we went to inspect two cottages that Jean had acquired on the Downs we loved so well. By knocking them into one we made a delightful home and moved in three days before the Armistice was signed.